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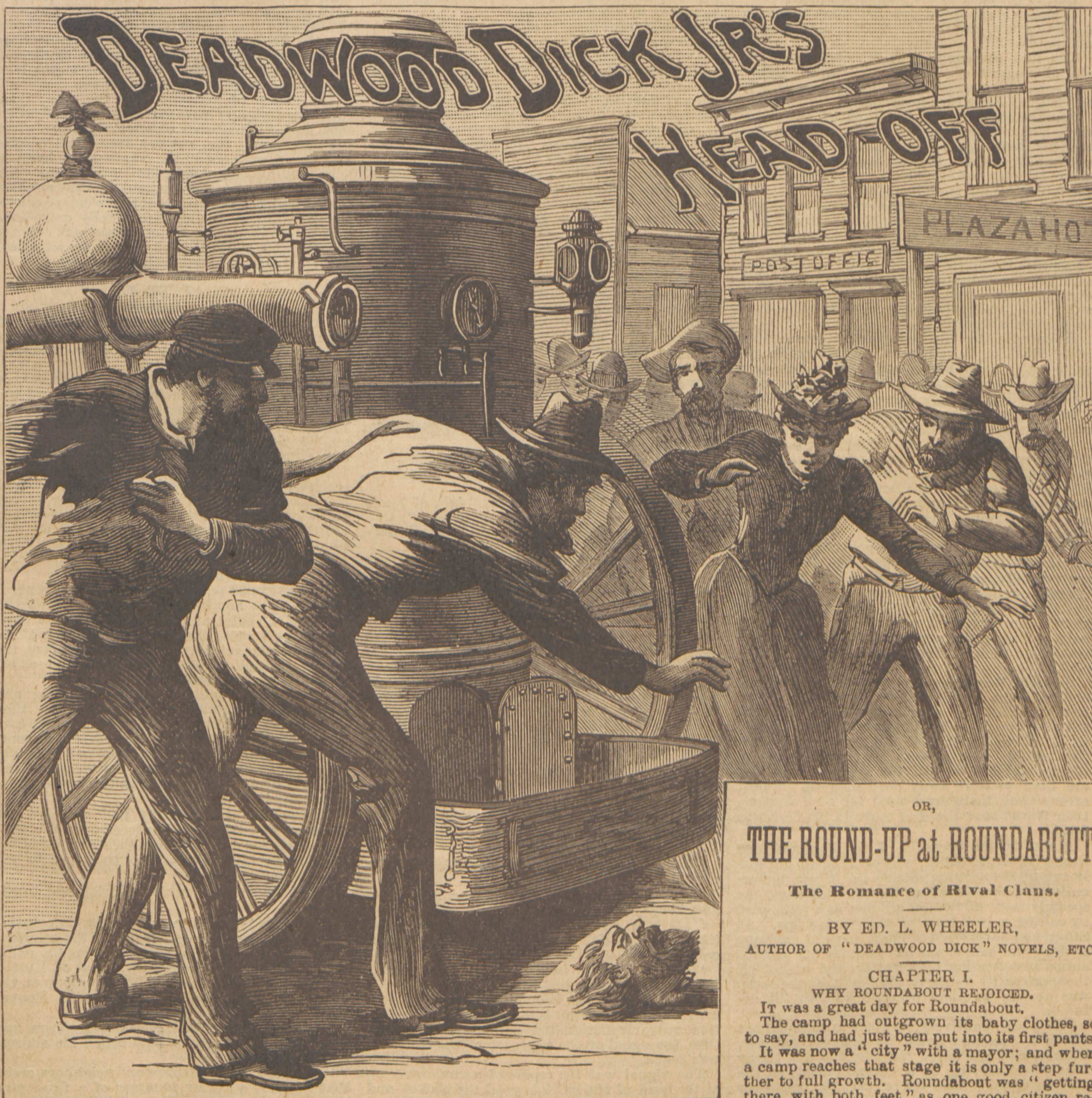
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A WOMAN'S PIERCING SHRIEK DOUBLY STARTLED THE AWE-STRICKEN CROWD.  
"MY GOD! IT IS THE HEAD OF MY FATHER!" FOLLOWED THE SHRIEK.

## OR, THE ROUND-UP at ROUNDABOUT.

The Romance of Rival Clans.

BY ED. L. WHEELER,  
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

### CHAPTER I.

#### WHY ROUNDABOUT REJOICED.

It was a great day for Roundabout. The camp had outgrown its baby clothes, so to say, and had just been put into its first pants. It was now a "city" with a mayor; and when a camp reaches that stage it is only a step further to full growth. Roundabout was "getting there with both feet," as one good citizen remarked.

A peculiar name for a city, you will say, per-



haps, but it was the best they could furnish. At the time of the election of the mayor it had been proposed that a new name be given the camp, but the names suggested could not supplant the old appellation around which the affections of the people had become entwined.

One worthy cit had proposed calling it Lyndon, he having something of the æsthetic in his make-up; but no one seconded his motion.

Said one man:

"We ain't no doods hyer, ar' we? What we want is a big-caliber name—a full-grown name wi' whiskers on et."

Various names were suggested, good, bad and worse; but not one of them seemed to strike the popular fancy right, so, it was voted to retain the old "handle" till such time when a better one could be thought of.

The camp had come by its name in this wise:

A party of prospectors, coming out upon one of the cliffs which overlooked the valley pocket on one side, had considered it a likely spot and decided to go down and investigate; but, they were so long in reaching the bottom, and had to make so wide and tortuous a detour, that, when they decided to stay, they were all in favor of calling the place "Roundabout."

But, to get back to the point of starting.

It was indeed a great day for Roundabout—a red-letter day, and the letter of the very biggest and reddest kind at that.

The new fire-engine was expected to arrive, and all manner of work at the camp—pardon, city,—had been suspended and the place was in full holiday dress for the occasion.

Some months prior to the time of our story there had been a great fire in the camp, a fire that had well-nigh wiped the place out of existence entirely; but, the mineral wealth being there, the city had sprung quickly up again like the fabled phoenix from its ashes.

Then, when it had been declared a city in fact, and a mayor elected, it was proposed that a fire-engine—the real article, gilt-edge, double-action, and all that sort of thing—should be sent for, in order that the city might be better able to cope with the devouring element in case of another conflagration. And, not only so, but the acquisition of a fire-engine would cause Hustleville to turn green with envy.

Hustleville, by the way, was a camp that stood rival to Roundabout. Both were in the same gulch, and not a mile apart, but were separated by a closing in of the rocky walls on both sides until only passage room remained.

This narrow passage from one camp to the other was called the "Choke."

The spirit of rivalry had existed ever since the time when both camps had endeavored to get the post-office and it had been awarded to Roundabout owing to the fact that Roundabout was the older place and the first on the trail, and the two camps were barely friendly to each other.

For some time, having the post-office, Roundabout was in the supremacy; but, Hustleville grew rapidly, and when, finally, owing to a slight misunderstanding among some of her denizens one night, material was furnished wherewith to start a cemetery, the Hustlevillains claimed the palm; off-ring the argument that a cemetery was better than a fourth-class post-office by long odds!

Secretly, Roundabout admitted this to herself, and the point was all the stronger and the thorn in the flesh all the deeper owing to the fact that there was no room in Roundabout for a cemetery. Roundabout had the smaller half of the pocket, even though the better, and all the ground was needed for more enterprising use than to store away dead men in. When, after a time, there arose need for such a place, then it was that the said thorn in the flesh was felt.

It was on the occasion of the death of one Stogy Stiver, so called, who came to an untimely end by committing suicide—as it was humorously put; the fact being that he contracted the speedily fatal ailment of a bullet in a vital part by calling a bad man of the camp a liar. As Stogy had never been of much account anyhow, nothing was said to the bad man for his prompt action in defending his veracity, and he got off the more easily owing to the fact that the camp was at loss to know what to do with the defunct.

There was, positively, no place in Roundabout where a cemetery could be started, and yet, little as they had cared for Stogy in life, Stogy dead was deserving of a decent burial; so, the only thing to be done was to carry the body over to Hustleville and ask permission to bury it there. And that they did. The good citizens of

the rival camp, after thinking the matter over, decided that it would cost their neighbors just twenty dollars to bury in their ground; and their ultimatum was—the payment of the said twenty dollars or carry the body home. It was a bitter pill, but the case was urgent and so the money was paid.

After awhile, however, Roundabout came up on top again with a newspaper, the *Roundabout Rustler*, and for a time held the lead. Hustleville, however, soon hustled around and set up a printing establishment of its own, and one day sent a horseman over into the rival camp to distribute sample copies of the *Hustleville Hustler*. They were just as good as their neighbors, they allowed; and they allowed, too, that their camp was still a little in the lead, having a green and thriving cemetery, even if the other camp did contribute to it. And so stood matters at the time of the fire, after which, for a considerable while, Hustleville certainly did hold the better hand. Now, however, Roundabout was about to rise supreme!

With a fire-engine, and a regularly organized fire company, where would poor benighted Hustleville be? That was what the "Hustlers" were asked. And that was just what the "Rustlers" were going to have; it had been ordered; it was expected to-day; and, everybody was crazy wild accordingly.

The citizens of these camps, it may be said in explanation, were called by each other more after the name of the respective paper of each camp than by the name of the camp itself. The good people of Hustleville had objected, to the point of fighting, to being called Hustlevillains—soon corrupted into "Hustle, villains!" and the men of Roundabout, not being particularly fond of the designation Roundabouts, were willing to compromise.

The street was full of people, and every Rustler was known by the broad expanse of smile upon his face.

Hustlers were there in goodly number, too; but they clearly were not "in it." They stood around with their hands in their pockets, looking on.

There was a considerable number of men on horseback, waiting to dash out and meet the coming freighters as soon as the signal of approach was heard, while hundreds on foot were ready to fall in line with the procession.

Mayor Gadzooks was on a prancing charger, looking the happy man he was, bowing gracefully to every woman who would favor him with a look; while Mayor Kreeps, of the contemporary camp, saw it all with a feeling of envy in his heart but a look of the utmost disdain upon his face.

"Ye think ye ar' doin' somethin' smart, I s'pose," Kreeps sneered, when he had proper opportunity.

"We ar' goin' ter do 'somethin' tall, ef that's what ye mean," Gadzooks retorted. "You folks won't be able ter reach us with a lightning-rod."

"Think we won't, hey? I'll bet we'll 'clipse ye inside of a month so bad ye won't know what's happened. What's more, we won't have ter have a clean-out by fire to give us an idee, either."

"No; you'll take pattern after us, same as ye did when ye started that wabble-kneed newspaper over there. But, go ahead, an' welcome to ye; ef it's a fire-engine, we have ther satisfaction of knowin' et can't be a finer one than ours, unless ye plate it wi' gold and silver."

"Have a care how you asperse the *Hustleville Hustler*, Mayor Gadzooks," the editor of that sheet spoke up. "We can hold our own with the *Roundabout Rustler*, we are vain enough to boast."

"Something you can't do and never have done, sir," cried the editor of the *Rustler*. "We originate; you imitate. We lead; you follow. We harvest; you scavenge."

"Sir! I'll handle you without gloves in my next!"

"I wouldn't handle you without gloves for any consideration, sir."

"Do you mean to imply, sir, that—that—that—What do you mean to imply, you rascally knave?"

"I don't mean to imply anything, you sneaking-varlet! I mean just what I said."

There might have been trouble, for these two men did sometimes get into that unholy occupation vulgarly designated a "scrap"; but just then the signal of the approach of the freighter was heard.

The signal was the report of a gun, away up at the head of the gulch beyond the pocket, and as soon as it was heard the horsemen dashed away in that direction; and, Editor Sneed, of

the *Rustler*, being one of them, the promising prospect for a free fight was nipped in the bud.

"Lucky for him he was called away," observed Editor Dubby, of the *Hustler*, to those around. "I was just on the point of jerking him down from his horse and giving him what he has been itching for a long time now."

No notice was taken of that, however. Everybody was too excited, and the crowd was hastening away in the direction the horsemen had taken to join in the triumphal pageant.

Every eye was turned toward the pass, now, where the coming freighter would first be seen, and every heart was filled with eager anticipation, Hustler as well as Rustler, but chiefly the latter.

It could not be denied that the possession of a fire-engine by one camp was a blessing to both; for, should a fire occur in Hustleville, the Rustlers would be only too glad to rush over there to show what they could do.

A quarter of an hour passed; then the horsemen up at the head of the gulch were seen to wave their hats and a cheer was soon borne along on the breeze. In another moment the leading horses of the freighter appeared, and the whole host of Rustlers cheered.

Team after team the horses came into sight, each animal bedecked with flags and plumes, until ten teams had appeared; and then was seen the massive wagon with its precious load. There was the fire-engine, all gleaming and glittering in its dress of polished brass and flashing nickel! And the way the Rustlers did let themselves loose then was exhilarating to behold.

The escort of horsemen led the way, then came the freighter with its ten teams, and after that the cheering and dancing populace. The Rustlers were the actors; the Hustlers the audience—being not in it. There was a drum, a horn, and any number of kettles and pans with which to increase the din, and in this manner the grand procession came into the camp, colors flying and band playing, and finally came to a halt before the Union Hotel, where nine rousing cheers and a whole den of tigers were let loose. Verily, it was Roundabout's greatest day!

## CHAPTER II.

### THEIR BLOOD-CHILLING FIND.

THE new fire-engine was certainly a thing of beauty, something its possessors might justly feel proud of, and if they were over enthusiastic there was an excuse for it.

Feeling so good themselves, they could not hold malice toward their neighbors, and the hand of fellowship was offered right and left without stint until the men of Hustleville were made to feel that they were not entirely out in the cold in the great demonstration.

The wrappings had been removed from the machine up in the pass, in order that it might be brought into camp in all its glory of red paint and bright glitter, but it still remained to take it down from the wagon, set it up, and give it a trial. The important part of the day's business yet remained to be performed, according to the programme.

Yes, a regular programme had been arranged.

A platform had been set up in the Square in front of the hotel and principal places of business and resort of the camp, and speechmaking was now next in order; the nine managers, the mayor, the editor and other leading citizens being billed to take part.

After that would come the unloading and setting up of the engine, and its trial, and then a dinner at the hotel, to which the leading men of the rival camp had been invited—out of courtesy? Perhaps so; but, the Rustlers were not overlooking any opportunity for "rubbing in" their claims to superiority, and this was certainly one not to be neglected.

By the time the cheering had subsided the speakers had taken their places upon the platform, and Onway Woodworth, manager of the Grub-stake Mine, stepped to the front to address the assemblage.

What he had to say was brief and to the point.

He congratulated the camp upon its valuable acquisition, urged upon the mayor the selecting of a company from the best material the camp could furnish, and assured the people of Hustleville that if a fire occurred in their camp on the other side of the Choke the boys from Roundabout would respond gladly to their call.

Then followed Editor Sneed and others, and lastly Mayor Gadzooks, who ended his address with the observation:

"And now, feller-citizens and neighbors, seein' that we have a reg'lar hummer of a fire-engine hyer, I want ter know ef et ain't 'bout time we kicked 'gainst payin' a tax of twenty dollars on



every plant we make in ther graveyard at Hustleville. Seems ter me et's time ter kick. A grave is a necessity, oncet in a while, an' so is a fire-ngine; and if ther tax is kept up on ther grave we'll have ter put a tax on our engine, that's all."

That was greeted with cheers and numerous remarks from both sides, but it was no time then to settle the matter, for everybody was eager to see the engine tried and willing hands were already preparing to unload it.

There was one man in the crowd who had been a city fireman some years before, and to him had been intrusted the experiment. If he proved his claim, and the trial was a success, it was altogether probable that he would be made captain of the company, so he was eager to do his best.

It took some little time to get the heavy machine safely off upon the ground, but it was accomplished finally, and the ex-fireman set to work at once to put it into working order.

Meanwhile a water-tank on wheels had been brought to the scene—being one of a pair which the citizens had constructed while waiting for the engine—together with the necessary fuel for starting up the fire.

The crowd was packed closely around, giving the workmen only just enough room to move about in comfortably, and hardly that, and everybody was eager to see the start made. They wanted to "see the thing go off," as they expressed it. That was what they were there for.

Finally the last screw had been turned and the last nut adjusted, and the engineer—this fireman, by the way, held a post as engineer at the mine—announced that he was ready to fill the boiler and start up the fire; which announcement was greeted with a cheer and the crowd fell back to give him plenty of room for these necessary finishing touches.

The boiler was filled, the pumping hose made fast to the tank-wagon, and the engineer then unwired the door of the fire-box to put in the fire.

When he had got the door opened he looked in, and the next instant sprang up and staggered back with face as pale as death.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "What a find!"

"What is it, Rube?" demanded the mayor.

"A man's head, as I live an' breathe!"

"What! You can't mean et, shorely!"

"Look in and see for yourself."

"Hang me ef thar ain't!" he exclaimed.

"How in mysteries did a man's head git in hyer?"

An' whose head is et, anyhow? Come out o' hyer, stranger, till we take a view at yer!"

To display his nerve and bravery under the circumstances the mayor reached in his arm and brought the caput forth by its scalp-lock, but instantly dropped it to the ground.

The sight of it was too much even for the mayor's nerves.

At the hideous sight the crowd fell back, filled with instinctive horror—all fell back, save a young girl, who, as if moved by a resistless impulse, suddenly pressed forward as if to see the face of the dead.

Then, even before the mayor could gain sufficient nerve to lift the ghastly find from the ground for the inspection of the crowd, a woman's piercing shriek doubly startled the awe-stricken crowd.

"My God! It is the head of my father!" followed the shriek.

And staggering back as the crowd now surged forward, the girl fell fainting into the arms of women, who caught her as she fell.

"Et's Little Maggie!" "She has fainted!" was shouted.

"Little Maggie?" cried Manager Woodworth, coming forward. "Then the poor child has found her father in a horrible way."

"That's what she has!" the mayor agreed.

"How in ther name o' wonders kem his head in hyer? And who put et in hyer? This thing has got ter be looked into!"

The crowd, spellbound till now, echoed the mayor's declaration to a man.

Little Maggie, as she was called, was a pretty waif, eighteen years of age, who had come to the mines about three months prior to the opening of our story.

She was in search of her father, she had told the citizens—had been looking for him high, low and everywhere; but, being out of money then, would have to seek employ for a time before searching further.

The big-hearted mayor of the camp befriended her at once, and the citizens responding to his call, put a shanty up for her and furnished it. There they installed her, and she set about making her living by doing washing and mending

for the miners. And, so she had continued to date.

She was respected by everybody for her simple purity, and thus it was that the mayor's proposition to avenge the crime was hailed so heartily.

Cried one man:

"You ar' right; et has got ter be looked inter, Mayor Gadzooks. Ther cuss what's killed ther daddy of Little Maggie has got ter answer to this hyer camp with his life."

"You bet he has!" another citizen approved, "and we'll have him hunted down, ef et takes a month o' Sundays ter do et."

"T'won't take no month o' Sundays if we kin git the right hound on the trail, an' Deadwood Dick, Jr., is jest that hound; what say, boys?"

"You have struck the bull's-eye," approved Manager Woodworth. "If any man alive can solve the riddle, he is the man."

The proposition was hailed with assent by the whole crowd, for the name of the famed Prince of the West was familiar to them all.

Several women had by this time gathered round the fainted girl, and in response to their efforts she soon regained her consciousness.

Her first act was to put her hands over her eyes, as though to shut out some terrible vision—the terrible sight which had been the cause of her fainting.

"Did I—did I see—it?" she asked. "Or, was it a dream?"

"There, there, don't think on't," one woman tried to soothe. "You was mistaken, o' course, 'bout et's bein'—"

"No, no; I must see it again; I must know the truth. I could not be mistaken. Let me see it—I must know—"

The mayor had been pressing his way toward her, the head still in his hand but held behind him.

"Can ye stand et, miss?" he asked. "Hadn't ye better wait?"

"No, no; let me see it and be sure!"

The mayor allowed her to look again upon the dead features, and as she did so a shiver ran over her, and with another cry she covered her face with her apron.

"It is he! it is he!" she sobbed. "It is the head of Joel Meadway, my father, that I have looked for so long. Who can have taken his life in so horrible a manner? Men of Roundabout, will you help me to solve this mystery and avenge the crime that has been done?"

"That's what we will, gal, an' you can bet on't," declared the mayor. "But, have you any idee who could 'a' done et? Had yer daddy any enemy who might want him out of ther way for any reason that you know on? Ef ye know anything o' that sort, now is ther time to say et out."

"No, no, I do not think he had any foe, sir. As I have told you, he was mildly insane, but harmless, when he wandered away. I cannot imagine why he has been killed and his head sent here, unless it was out of pure wantonness by some heartless villain. Oh! it is horrible, horrible! Will you please see that the head is buried, Mr. Gadzooks?"

The mayor promised, and the young woman went away to her shanty, accompanied by two or three women, her neighbors.

The mayor made his way back to the platform then mounted it, and said:

"Feller galoots, the findin' of this hyer cabeza has somewhat throwed a dash of cold water over the events of ther day, and ther more so sence et has been recognized as the head of the daddy of our Little Maggie. But, sence et's somethin' we couldn't in no wise help, we'll carry out the rest of the programme jest ther same. After that, I want to announce, thar will be a funeral in good style fer this dead man's head, to which I want this hyer camp to 'tend in proper manner out of respect fer our leetle protegee."

So, the rest of the programme was carried out, the engine proving a grand success, and likewise the dinner that followed the trial.

Then came the funeral, as announced, and the head was interred in the cemetery at Hustleville—free of cost.

That done, a meeting was held to take measures toward solving the mystery of the severed head, and the voice of the meeting was—that the great detective, Deadwood Dick, Jr., be sent for and the case placed in his hands. And that, accordingly, was carried out, the first steps being taken immediately.

#### CHAPTER III.

##### PRESENTS SOME PASSENGERS.

THE evening stage made its roundabout way down through Rocky Gulch, and on to Round-

bout, with an unusually full complement of passengers.

When the Jehu drew up and stopped before the Union Hotel, bringing Lis four animals around with a graceful swing, he sung out:

"Hyar we ar' again, Rustlers! An' hyer's the biggest load I have brought in fer a dczen weeks. How did ther ingine work?"

"Oh, bully!" he was told; and further remarks were exchanged while the passengers were alighting.

One of these was a woman, a good-looking little body clad in what seemed to be half-masculine attire. She wore a skirt to her shoe-tops, but the upper half of her person was fitted admirably with a jacket and vest of bronze velvet.

A hat of the same was upon her head, and a white shirt-front with dainty tie and collar added to the general good effect of the outfit. A diamond flashed upon her tie, another upon one of her fingers, and a beautiful gold chain spanned her vest. She looked the sport she evidently was.

Another passenger worthy of notice was a man, a fellow with long hair and a pensive expression of countenance.

He was attired in black, wearing a frock coat of extra length, now shiny and seedy with long use, which was buttoned high up in the neck as if to conceal the fact that its owner wore no "billed" linen.

Standing in rough and rusty boots under a silk hat of ancient pattern that had long ago lost its shape and sleekness, the fellow looked a personification of the shabby genteel. A stubble of beard covered his face, witness in itself that the man was suffering with an acute attack of hard times.

With the other passengers we have nothing to do—at any rate not just at present.

The woman mentioned was evidently traveling alone.

She had paused to look about for a moment upon alighting, but getting her bearings quickly, so to put it, she started for the hotel.

There was an air of snap and business about her, something brisk and refreshing, and it was as plain as the nose on a man's face that she was no tenderfoot, but perfectly able to take care of Number One.

She entered the bar-room without any hesitation, knowing from experience, evidently, that there she would find the office as well, and advancing straight to the bar confronted the clerk in a manner that showed she was quite at home there or anywhere else.

"Got a room that will fit a chap of my size?" she asked, resting her fists on the bar as she put the question.

"Well, I guess so," was the answer. "I take it by your looks that you want somethin' that ain't no slouch, hey? Want the best we've got?"

"Not particular about that, so long as it is clean and comfortable. I don't go in heavy on style when I'm looking for sleep quarters; what I'm after is solid comfort, every time."

"Well, I can fix you out, then, pat."

"All right. Flip me your quill and I'll jot down my name for you."

The clerk, smitten and smiling, handed out a pen, and with a free and easy stroke the woman penned the words:

"Fly Fan, of 'Frisco."

"Fly Fan, eh?" the clerk read. "That's a name that fits your looks well enough, anyhow."

"And I'm just as fly as I look, too, you bet!" was the saucy retort. "But I don't put up with any nonsense, so don't make any mistake on that point."

With that, and a jerk of the head to give it emphasis, she turned away and coolly surveyed the idlers about the room, at the same time taking note of the others who entered, passingly. Meanwhile, what of the other?

When he had reached the ground, climbing awkwardly down from the top of the "hearse," he struck an attitude—something of a Wild Oscar pose, and flinging back his flowing hair with a flirt of the head, exclaimed,

"Methinks all nature bids me welcome here!"

"A poick, by darn!" cried one man.

"Yes, an' et sticks out all over him," said another.

"Say, rather, a child of Nature," the stranger mildly corrected.

"A dear leetle child you be," one fellow laughed. "Does yer mammy know ye ar' hyer?"

"Scoff not," the poet chided. "I mind not



the trifles of life. I am all soul and inner peace. You look only upon the outer man."

With two fingers of his right hand thrust under the lap of his buttoned coat, the other hand behind him, one foot slightly advanced and his head thrown back, he looked like a caricature of Ajax defying the lightning, in a longtailed frock coat.

The crowd was amused.

"By the way," recovering from one pose to strike another of equal grace and beauty, "am I right in supposing this edifice to be an hotel?"

"Can't ye read their sign—Union Hotel?" was demanded.

"Ha! now I see it, and I am made aware that my supposition was right. But, is it strictly first-class?"

"You bet!"

"Because, no plebeian abode will do for me, you know. And, have I been rightly informed that you have a newspaper here?"

"You have not been led astray on that point," spoke up Editor Sneed, promptly. "There is one newspaper here—one only, and I speak for Hustleville as well as for our own city."

"And that one, sir, is the *Hustleville Hustler*," chimed in Editor Dubby, of that sheet. "My contemporary has well said there is but one; his own flimsy apology for a newspaper is a disgrace to the press at large. If you want the news, buy the *Hustler*, sir!"

"The stale news," cried Sneed. "You will get nothing else there."

"Ha! I am in good fortune!" cried the poet. "Perhaps I can get a place on the staff of each as poet laureate. I will call on you to-morrow, gentlemen, at your respective places of business, if I mistake not in supposing you to be the editors of the papers in question."

"You needn't darken my door," cried Sneed. "I want no poetry."

"And as I never accept anything once declined by my contemporary, you needn't call on me," Dubby assured.

The poet's chin dropped to his breast, and he stalked sorrowfully off toward the hotel and entered the bar-room.

Many others had gone in by this time, to learn what they could about the new arrivals, and now many more followed, eager to see more of this eccentric character and maybe expecting some fun.

It was just after Fly Fan had registered and turned away with her parting remark to the clerk.

The self-proclaimed poet strode to the bar, and taking up the pen the female sport had laid down, proceeded forthwith to register without let or hindrance.

This was what he wrote:

"PHILEMON TENNISON, Poet.

"Poetry on tap, exceeding fine,  
And only twenty cents a line!"

"See here, what are you about?" cried the clerk, seeing the pen running on and on.

"I have done," said the poet, humbly, laying the pen down. "I could not resist the temptation to insert a sample of my inspiration."

"Sample of your grandmother's gingerbread! You have spoiled that page, now, with your foolishness! I'll charge it against you in your bill. You had no business to do it."

"Your pardon I humbly crave, dear sir," with a meek and lowly bow. "But, as I said, the temptation overcame me. When I have a pen poised in hand, and the virgin page is before me, it is impossible for me to resist. I am willing, however, that you put it in the bill, as you suggest."

"And I'll put it in strong, too. What kind of a room do you want now?"

"What kind of a room do I want? Why, I want the best, to be sure, sir. In the words of the bard—

"Man wants but little here below,  
But wants a good deal of it."

"However, it isn't a question of my want, but of what you will supply. The fact of the matter is, sir, I am lacking the plebeian wherewith called cash. At the present time I am minus the—"

"Great Scott! You don't mean to say you're broke?"

"So a more vulgar mind might term it, sir. I myself will call it a state of temporary impecuniosity."

"And yet you had the gall to prance up here and slam your name down upon this register! And not only that, but a lot of rubbish besides! Sir, I've a notion to take you out and set the dogs on you!"

"Don't be angry, dear sir—don't be angry, I

beg of you!" the poet cried. "It is bad for the health to give way to choler. Let me explain my case before you condemn me. Verily, I thought my name alone would be sufficient guarantee of good faith, till I could redeem it with the legal tender."

"Worse and worse! You are a skin, that's what you are, and the sooner you get out of here the better!"

"You wound a tender spirit," the poet cried sadly, placing his hand over his heart and rolling his eyes. "You can never know the pangs you have caused me in my soul."

"I'll cause you pangs somewhere else, if you don't get a move on you," was the hot rejoinder, for the clerk was truly mad. "You'll find that you can't come here to Roundabout and do just as you please, no matter what you can do anywhere else. Come, I mean biz!"

"Say, hold your horses a minute!" spoke up the girl-sport, Fly Fan. "Give the poet half a show. It's one on you, anyhow, seems to me. How much will make him solid here for a week?"

The price was named, and the girl tossed a coin to the irate clerk.

"Take that," she said, "and try and cool off. Don't mention it, sir," to the poet. "You can repay me when you get afloat again."

"Fair lady, accept the honest thanks of a humble bard," cried the poet, bowing low before her. "With my first earnings here I will repay your gracious loan. Thou, sir," to the clerk, "behold me once again a man!"

The clerk grumbled something to himself, while he made the change for the girl-sport, while the others present indulged in a little jesting and joking, at his expense, which, of course, did not add to his good temper.

This badinage had not yet subsided when something of a thrilling nature took place. A man who had entered quietly sprung suddenly forward, caught the girl sport by the arm, and in a loud voice cried out:

"Ha! you jadel I have got you at last, have I?"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### AND NOW A FIGHTING POET.

THE room was all excitement in a moment.

To the amazement of all, the man was no other than one Aaron Prestley, chief owner and manager of the Minnie Mine at Hustleville.

Who and what was this woman to him? That was the question that came instantly to each mind. For the moment no one moved or spoke, each man apparently waiting for some one else to lead.

The poet was the first to take action, and he did so without delay.

At such a time, seconds seem minutes, and it was not probable that more than a single second elapsed before the poet acted.

He did so even before the woman herself could speak, for she had sprung back, making an effort to get away, staring at her captor in momentary alarm. In that brief moment the poet was to her rescue.

"Sir!" he cried, laying hold upon the mine-manager's arm with a grip that made him loosen his hold upon the girl's wrist, "what means this? This lady has just rendered me a service, and I will not see her abused, much less insulted. What do you mean by your words?"

"Come, answer me, and answer quick,  
Or the floor I'll wipe up with you slick!"

That tickled the crowd, and all laughed.

The poet did not look as though he could master the weakest man in town, in a fair scrimmage.

"Remove your hand," cried the manager. "If you don't you'll repent it. I do not have to answer to you or any one else concerning my doings—"

"You make a mistake there, my dear sir," the poet interrupted. "You have got to answer to me for this bit of your doings, for this lady has befriended me and I am not going to stand by and see her abused. Just explain what you mean by what you have said. And, in the mean time, let go of her arm entirely."

"And do it quick, or you will rue it;  
What I've said I'll do, I'll do it."

As he spoke his grip tightened upon the man's arm, and with a wince of pain the manager let the girl's hand drop.

"Yes, I'll explain what I mean," he cried. "It means that I have just found this woman, my wife, who ran away from me a couple of years ago; and it means, too, that I'm going to take charge of her now in spite of you

and all the rest of the crowd here. Furthermore, it means that if you do not let go of me instantly you will find yourself at full length on the floor!"

"I'll take my chances of that, in the defense of woman fair," responded the poet. "Lady, what say you to this man's charge?"

"I say it is false!" the woman cried, with accent of keenest scorn. "I never saw him before in my life!"

"How sayest thou?" the poet demanded. "I take the word of the lady, every time."

"I say take your hand off my arm!" cried the manager, now flushed with rage.

With a savage jerk he tore himself loose.

"What I have said is true," he cried in rage.

"This woman is my wife, and I am going to have her in spite of all she says to the contrary, and in spite of you, too. Out of my way, you scare-crow!"

"Don't drive too hard over rough places," the poet warned. "You may spill your load if you do. I have been called the fighting poet, and I'm going to carry out the little job I have undertaken here; that is, to defend this lady who has befriended me. Did I not do so I would not be worthy to be called a man, sir—a man!"

"I'm here to do my little best  
Defending beauty in distress."

"That's right, Poet!" sung out one man.

"We are all hunky on that!"

"And he's only a hustler, anyhow," reminded another, whether the poet could understand the significance of that or not.

This man, Aaron Prestley, was a comparative stranger at Roundabout. He had been at Hustleville not more than a couple of months at most, and very little was known about him.

It was known, though, that he was a stern, hard man with his men, and that he had a will that was hard to bend. Furthermore, he had displayed his prowess as a fighter.

On one occasion he had overcome the admitted "bad" man of the camp in a very brief time, and since then had been left pretty severely alone. Hence, his action on this occasion was a surprise, and it looked as though the poet would suffer.

The men who had called out to the poet were more eager for a little fun than anxious for the poet's personal safety.

"You are here to get a broken back, as you will mighty soon find," the angered man cried, not noticing the interruption. "I tell you this woman is my wife, and I want that to settle it. She got up on her ear and left me a couple of years ago, as I said, and I haven't seen her since. I'll show her now, though, that she won't do it again."

"Better not jolt your wagon too hard," the poet mildly advised. "The lady's under my protection by force of circumstances, and there she will remain till you can prove your claim. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

The woman had placed herself behind the poet, thus showing by her action that she accepted the protection offered, whether it would amount to anything or not, and all the crowd looked on eagerly to see the outcome.

As for the mine-manager, he was placed in a position from which he could not now draw back without discredit to himself.

"What am I going to do about it!" he cried, fiercely. "I'll show you in one brief minute, curse you!" at which threat he leaped forward, dealing a savage blow at the poet's nose.

The poet did not get injured, however. With a sweep of the arm he brushed the blow aside, and the mine-manager collided with him at full force, breast to breast, in an unexpected manner.

"You will find that you have run up against something solid, sir," he said mildly, as he gently pushed the man back from him. "I am not called the fighting poet for nothing. Now you had better listen to the voice of the bard and go a little slow till you are sure you are right."

"As the sage unto the student said;  
Be sure you're right, then go ahead."

"Who the deuce are you, anyhow?" the manager fiercely demanded.

"Philemon Tennison, sir, at your service," was the answer, and with hand upon his breast the poet made a bow.

"And by what right do you take it upon yourself to interfere between man and wife?"

"By the right that the lady has befriended me, and I won't see her abused, in the first place; and then, what you claim is denied by her. You will have to bring the proof, and I think the good citizens of this camp will bear me out in what I say. No proofs, no claim allowed."



"That's what's the matter," cried the mayor, who had come in in time to hear what was going on. "Roundabout stands ready to defend this lady, Mr. Prestley, until you can prove your claim to her by right o' law."

"Which he can never do," the girl sport declared. "I do not know him, never saw him before, and if he is honest in what he claims, he simply mistakes me for some one else."

"By heavens, I am not mistaken!" the man retorted. "Don't you suppose I know you, Mary Graves?"

"It is still more clear that you do not, sir, for that is not my name, never was, and never will be!"

"Then what is your name?"

"I am known as Fly Fan; and, you will find that I am fly enough to take care of myself, too. While I thank this gentleman for his interference in my behalf, yet I want to tell you that I am well prepared to deal with such a fellow as you. If you don't believe it, just try your game on again, that's all."

This was said with such admirable insistence, that it brought a cheer from the crowd.

"Well, it is just possible that I may be mistaken," the manager admitted, to himself and the crowd as well; "but, I don't see how two persons could look so much alike. For the present I'll have to halt, but all the worse for you if I find I am right."

"As fine a display of horse sense as I ever saw!" avowed the poet, with a burst of enthusiasm. "You have done the proper thing, under the circumstances, sir. I feel quite proud of you. It is quite an art to fall gracefully, when a fall is bound to be the next thing on the programme. It isn't every man can tell at a glance when he is in a horn. I congratulate you, sir."

And the poet went so far as to hold out his hand, but the manager disdained to notice the proffer.

"No credit is due you, anyhow, and you needn't take any," he snapped. "And you, my lady, look out for me if I find you are the person I take you to be."

"And you, my man," the spirited girl retorted, "look out for a snag if you run up against me again, that is all. Does that sound anything like your lost Mary? Whether it does or does not, it means business. Sir," to the clerk, "I'll go to my room if you please."

Her request was like an imperious order, and the clerk hastened to conduct her to her room.

"Now it is just barely possible that I may be mistaken," remarked the mine-manager, then, "but I don't think I am. I believe that woman is my wife, and if she is I am going to have her in spite of your teeth, men of Roundabout."

"Don't see how you will get her, if she ain't willin' to go," suggested Mayor Gadzooks. "She's under the protection of this city, now, and I think we can hold her if she wants to be held. See?"

"No use talking that way, sir; if she is mine and I can prove it, the law will give her to me, and I'll have her. Has that stage gone on to Hustleville yet? I hope not."

But, the stage had gone on, and the discomfited manager set forth to walk home, not even waiting for his mail at the post-office.

No sooner had he left the room than Editor Sneed, of the *Rustler*, went up to the poet and took his arm.

"I want to talk with you, sir," he said. "Now that the editor of that rotten sheet beyond the Choke is not by, I'll make a proposition to you. I do want a poet on my staff, and you are just the man I want. What do you say to it?"

"If there is money in it, sir, I am your poet."

"And there is. You come on and show me what kind of work you can turn out in our next, and we'll come to terms. With a fire-engine and a fighting poet, I am of the opinion that Hustleville won't be able to hold up its head at all."

Poet Tension was then given the story of the rival camps.

#### CHAPTER V.

##### PRESENTS A PAIR OF ROGUES.

ONE passenger who had come by the stage on this same night went with it over to Hustleville.

If Hustleville was denied the privilege of a post-office it did have a stage the same as Roundabout, and there the stage put up over night.

Hustleville had its hotel, too, one called the Rocky Gulch House, and when the stage drew up and stopped before that hostelry the mentioned passenger alighted there and entered.

He was a person above the medium height, dark-browed, with a close-trimmed mustache, and had a pair of keen and searching eyes, calculated to make a timid man quail before his steady gaze. He was neatly clad in a business suit of a dark color.

Entering the hotel he singled out the landlord at a glance.

"Sir, is Mr. Aaron Prestley stopping here?" he made inquiry.

"Yes, sir, he is," was the prompt information given.

"Where is he just now?"

"I guess he has gone over to Roundabout for his mail, sir."

"Ha! then I would have met him by getting out there. But, no matter, for I suppose he will be back here again shortly."

"No doubt he will; he don't often stay over thar, sir."

"Well, have you any room for me here?"

"Yes, plenty of it."

"Then I'll just register and take something to eat while I wait."

The landlord was willing enough he should do that, and pushed out the book and dipped a pen for him.

The stranger wrote:

"EDMUND MURTAGH,

Chicago."

Making his terms with his host, the stranger went into the dining-room, and was still there when Prestley reached the camp.

"Man hyer to see you, sir," said the landlord, when the mine-manager entered the bar-room.

"Who is he?"

"Name is Murtagh—"

"Ha! he is here, eh? Where is he?"

"Takin' his rations jest now."

"I'll step in and see him."

And he did so.

"Hello!" the new-comer cried, when he entered the room. "Here you are, eh?"

"Yes; and you are here a little sooner than I expected. What has brought you ahead of time?"

"Business."

"As I could have answered myself."

"Well, I'm about done here; suppose we go to your room, or mine, and talk the thing over a little."

"I'm with you."

They had shaken hands on meeting, more business-like than heartily, and now Prestley led the way to his room above.

When they had entered there, and the door had been closed after them, they took seats and entered upon their conversation in low tones.

"You asked what has brought me here sooner than I expected to arrive," said Murtagh, then.

"Yes, so I did. I didn't look for you yet awhile."

"Well, I am here because the business has gone so as to make it proper for me to appear upon the scene. Is the girl here yet?"

"Oh, yes; she is here," and the manager smiled grimly.

"Good! What do you know about her affairs?"

"As much as anybody else, I guess. She is as pure as an angel, and makes an honest living doing mending for the men."

"Is she heart whole and fancy free, so to put it?"

"Yes, far as I know, she is."

"Ther I am in luck, truly. If I can only win her regard at sight, that will be half the battle won, won't it?"

"It will."

"Still looking for her father?"

"No; she's found him at last—"

"Found him? I happen to know that he is dead."

"I would naturally infer that he must be; she found only his head."

"His head! Great Scott! what are you driving at?"

"Well, his head came here to-day, and at sight of it she recognized it and fainted."

"Explain—explain. How came the head of Joel Meadway here?"

"Well, our neighboring camp received a fire-engine to-day, and when they opened its fire-box there was a human head—"

"Joel Meadway's head!"

"Yes."

"Wonderful!"

"It was taken out, and was recognized as I have said. That's the long and the short of it, and so I was not surprised when you said Meadway is dead."

"Should think not, after that. But, there is something horrible about this, on my word. And, mystery of mysteries! how came his head there? This is something that gets ahead of me."

"You are playing it well, I must admit."

"Playing what well?"

"Innocence."

"Curse you! do you mean to infer that I know anything about it? I want you to understand, Prestley, that I am above such business as that."

"But, it works to your advantage to have Meadway out of the way."

"I admit it; but, that is not to say that I would kill him and cut off his head and send it here, is it?"

"Maybe not."

"Positively not. I happened to know of the man's death, and having the information, have come here to look after the girl. That is all there is in it so far as I am concerned."

"Well, I'll have to take your word for it, I suppose."

"Curse you again! I guess you will. If not, if that won't do, I'll back it up with proof!"

"Proof for what?"

"Why, that Meadway is dead, that he died a natural death, and that he has been decently buried."

"Then how came his head in the box of the fire-engine?"

"I tell you that is what puzzles me. How should I know how it came there? I only know what I know; no more."

"What do you know, then?"

"I'll tell you one thing, and that is—that I don't like the manner in which you put your questions. If you suspect me of any evil in this matter, let me set you right, here and now. I am out of it."

"Well?"

"You know that I have been interesting myself in the search for Joel Meadway, for, in order that the estate might be settled, he must be found, or proof of his death established."

"Exactly."

"I have looked everywhere, and was about to give it up when the thought came to me to turn my attention exclusively to Chicago."

"I understand you."

"You see, that having been his home, naturally, in his weak state of mind, he could be looked for to return there, perhaps seeking his former residence and former business occupations."

"Clear enough reasoning, I think."

"As it proved. I had his old haunts watched, and finally got on track of him as he appeared there. He was sick, ragged and miserable, but it was he. My man followed him with the object of learning where he was stopping, but on the way the unfortunate man was run over in the street."

"He was taken to a hospital, and when my man had located him he came and reported to me, and I went there. The man was unknown, but I identified him as Joel Meadway. The record can be found there at the hospital all straight. He was fatally injured, and in a few days died, and was decently buried. That's the whole of the matter, so far as I am concerned in it."

"Then, with that proof of his death, I came here—for what purpose you know. I was coming, anyhow, but not quite so soon, aiming to be on hand when the girl came of age, in order to make sure of her hand, if possible. Now that she is an heir, whether of age or not, I am bound to have her if I can, with your help. If not, then will come the real scheme, of which you already have the outline. What do you think about it all, knowing the girl?"

"I think you stand a slim chance of winning her."

"Why so?"

"First, because you are not the sort to catch a girl's eye; next, because all the bloods of the camp have laid siege to her heart without making the slightest impression upon it."

"That won't hinder me from making a try at it, anyhow. If I find it's no use, then we will have to fall back upon the scheme. If the real Maggie Meadway hasn't got the good sense to recognize what is best for her, then we will find a Maggie Meadway that has, that's all."

"And the real Maggie—"

"Oh! she will disappear. I can't understand about that head business, though. How and why came it in the box of that engine?"

"If you have told me the truth, it is a mystery, as you declare."

"And why should I lie to you about it? Are we not in this thing together? I would not try to deceive you."

"That is all right; I can't swear to it. But, see here: now that I am helping you I am going to call on you to help me carry on a little game of my own. Will you do it?"



"I think I'm helping you pretty well as it is."  
 "That's not it. I have just run up against my wife, and she disowns me. I want proof that she is just who I declare her to be. See?"

"Oh!" that's simple enough. She is the woman, of course; I know her well. You want to lay claim to her again, eh? All right; just call on me to identify the property for you. Ha! ha! ha!"

Their talk ran on in that vein for some time, being livened by some drink which they presently sent for, and when finally they parted company it was with a good understanding between them. A more rascally pair of conspirators it might be hard to find anywhere.

#### CHAPTER VI.

##### TROUBLE IN THE SILVER.

AFTER supper at the Union Hotel the fighting poet retired to his room, where, for a considerable while he busied himself with writing.

Any one looking in upon him casually might have thought he had his muse in harness and was exercising it around the Parnassian arena at a lively canter; but, such a supposition would have been erroneous.

Mr. Tennyson was not writing poetry, but letters.

He wrote several, some of good length, and some were sealed and inclosed within other letters, all stamped and directed.

When he had done, finally, he went down and out, and learning where the post-office was located, quietly dropped his letters in when no one was near to observe the action.

That done, and the hour being still early, for a mining-camp, he wandered around to see the sights.

The chief resort of Roundabout, of an evening, was the Silver Saloon, and as he passed it the fighting poet—so to call him, was drawn to enter upon hearing the strains of a lively polka.

As he entered, he caught up the tails of his long coat and the step of the music at the same time, and away he went down the floor, flinging his heels like a frisky young colt just let out to play, greatly to the amusement of all beholders, his long hair beating measure upon his shoulders.

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed one man. "See ther poic caper, wull yer?"

"He's a dandy, ain't he! See ther fling of his hoofs, will ye? Jest git onto ther grace of his step!"

"Et's a wonder he wouldn't take a pardner wi' him. Hyer, Slickery Sal, you jest prance out thar an' couple up wi' him, an' show us what ye kin do together. I'll bet he'll fling ye!"

The woman addressed, in no wise afflicted with over modesty, obeyed the directions promptly.

Out she went to where the poet had the floor all to himself, and as he came around her way she flung herself into his arms and caught the step with him and away they went.

The other dancers had stopped to look at the lone poet, and now they got out of the way to give the couple plenty of room.

The woman claimed to be the best dancer in the camp, and was in great demand at every dance; she now set about proving her claim, having a partner who was her equal.

Into it they went, seemingly with heart and soul, and by the time they ended Slickery Sal was doing some pretty tall kicking, to the amusement of the crowd in general.

When they stopped the crowd cheered.

"Next to poetry," spoke the poet, making his bow, "is music and the dance. I move in harmony with the dulcet strains; my soul expands and my muse disports herself wantonly to the rhythm of the air.

"Away, away, dull care, away.  
 Nor trouble me just now;  
 I'm here for fun; 'tis just begun;  
 Let me dance like a kyloe cow."

"Like a cow?" exclaimed his late partner. "You ar' the best dancer in this camp, and I'm what says so."

"Not to speak flattery of myself," rejoined the poet, "I will say that I am good at anything but my main hold lies in poetry. Thanks, fair lady, for the pleasure of the dance. If you have enjoyed it half as much as I, you are repaid."

"Oh! that's all right; didn't look fer pay, you know."

"And by my beard—when it grows—I fear me you would look in vain if you did, just now. I am what one might vulgarly term down at the heel. But, I'll rise on the wings of the sunrise, soon, for I am to be poet laureate on the Roundabout Rustler. I'll put you in rhyme among my first efforts, Slickery Sal.

"Oh, I'll sing you a song that will tickle your heart,  
 That will make tears of gladness, down roll;  
 I will put you in rhyme in the bang-uppest time,  
 Till your feelings you cannot control."

The crowd cheered and laughed, enjoying this immensely.

Just then, however, another actor appeared upon the scene, a bullwhacker with bleared eyes and tangled hair.

This was one Knocker-out Jeems, so-called, the fellow who killed Stogy Stiver, as mentioned incidentally further back. And by the look in his eyes now he was looking for further gore.

"What's that ye ar' goin' ter do?" he cried. "Who is et ye ar' goin' ter do all that 'ar with? I want ye to know that I, myself, Knocker-out Jeems, ther boss of this hyer cit, have got some-thin' ter say to that. I had this hyer gal booked fer that dance, an'—"

"But, that was only an extra fling," interposed the woman, Slickery Sal. "I haven't forgotten you, Knocker-out."

"You jest hold your jaw while I talk, ef you please," cried the blusterer. "My bone ter pick is with this hyer long-haired scarecrow, an' I'm goin' ter have it out wi' him, you bet. When I have my gal booked fer a dance, you kin bet I'm goin' ter have that 'ar dance or know ther reason—"

"But, he didn't dance with me; I up and danced with him," the woman tried to make him understand, for sake of peace.

"Never you mind; I know what I am about, I guess. I tell ye, Mister Man, ye have got ter take another kind o' dance wi' me, right hyer at' now, an' then we'll see how 'bout all that poltry stuff ye will write 'bout anybody. Peel yer coat, now, fer I'm right up on my muscle ter fight fer my rights."

"My dear, good sir," cried the poet, abjectly, "you are going to mar a pleasant occasion. You are going to do something for which you will be sorry, I feel sure you will. Don't let us have any hard feelings. If I have done anything amiss I crave humble pardon for it, and am willing to take water in the biggest kind of gulps rather than get into trouble.

"'Tis dogs' delight to bark and bite,  
 For 'tis their nature to;  
 But 'tis a thing, you hear me sing,  
 Men hadn't ought to do."

"Waugh! That's all dishwater stuff, that is. You ar' afeerd o' me, that is whar all ther pain is—"

"I admit it, sir—I admit it; you are enough to frighten anybody. Please do not let us get into any difficulty here, now; it is out of place."

"Not a bit et ain't! Et's jest in place, every time. You have 'sulted me 'fore all ther company, takin' my gal when it was my turn ter dance, an' now ye have got ter take me whether ye want to or not."

"Well, if I must I s'pose I must, that's all. What shall it be—waltz, polka, or mazurka?"

"Et's goin' ter be a double-time schotish, that what et's goin' ter be, an' don't ye fail ter ketch onto et, either. Come right in, now, an' we'll git into swing fer et. Come right on, I tell yer!"

The bullwhacker was now advancing, his arms up and his big fists cutting the air.

"Really, sir, really, I had rather not; I have no desire—"

"I know ye ain't no desire; that's what's ther matter; but I have, an' that is all that's required."

"You do not know, sir, what you are about to do. My soul runs more to poetry than to the fistic art, and you cause my gentle muse to tremble at your coming. The pillar of song within me totters to its base—"

"Yas, an' so will you, in about one second. Put up—"

They were up.

He referred to the poet's fists, and as he spoke he let out a reminder from the shoulder as a hint that the poet must defend himself.

The blow amounted to nothing, however, for it was brushed aside easily and the bullwhacker turned half around at the same time, when the poet gave him a gentle kick.

"Do not do that again," he warned. "I do not care to have dirty fists thrust under my nose. My sensitive soul turns sick at the thought. You had better drop the matter, sir, before it is made worse. Exercise faith. Believe that you are satisfied, and satisfied you are without further trouble.

"Who probes a sore increases pain,  
 Who stirs a stink makes more;  
 You try that trick on once again,  
 I'll land you on the floor."

The crowd whooped at that, too.

The bullwhacker, however, bellowed in a loud voice, and wheeling, made for his tormentor like a raging lion.

He closed his eyes as he came, and with his arms working like the rods on a speeding locomotive, plunged forward blindly with the intention of doing desperate and terrible things.

To his surprise, however, he kept right on plunging, for he did not fall in with his victim at all, but collided with the wall, which was close at hand.

At which the laughter of the multitude enraged him the more.

He wheeled about with a snort.

There stood the poet, with arms folded, apparently just where he had seen him before.

"You should look where you are going, sir," the poet warned, mildly. "When you make a charge like that you ought to do it with your eyes open."

"I'll close your eyes, that's what I'll do for yours!" the whacker howled in his rage. "You'll find in a minnit that this ain't no fun, even ef ye think et is now. Waugh!"

"I have not thought it fun, sir; you seem to be enjoying it, however. Don't let me spoil it for you."

"Spoil nothin'! Waugh! Waugh!" and in he plunged, but the next moment took a header in the direction of the wall from which he had just advanced.

The fist of the poet had met his proboscis with force, and he was sent over upon his beam's-ends, so to put it, and piled up in a heap on the floor after butting the wall with force enough to have broken his neck.

The crowd hooted and cheered uproariously.

"I told him to take care," asseverated the poet, meekly, "but he would have it. I am not responsible, I hope.

"I have been called the fighting poet;  
 Perhaps this man will come to know it."

The big bully, growling like a tiger, was untangling himself, and the next moment, when he got upon his feet, he appeared with a revolver in hand and shoot in his eye.

#### CHAPTER VII.

##### HOW THE TROUBLE ENDED.

KNOWING the character of the man as they did, the crowd was immediately filled with concern for the safety of the fighting poet.

A dozen different voices shouted warning to him at the same time, and half as many made move forward to balk the enraged whacker in his mad intention.

Quicker than these, however, was the action of the poet himself, and as soon as the warning had been sounded and the move for interference made, it was seen that neither was necessary.

"Whoop!" cried the poet, and his arms at full length presented a pair of glittering revolvers straight at Mr. Knocker-out Jeems's head.

The bully stopped short, his eyes staring and his mouth open, the weapon in his hand only half raised.

"Look out where you drive," the poet cautioned. "Here's a terrible snag just ahead of you."

"Put up them weepins, blast ye!" the baffled ruffian cried.

"With pleasure, sir, when you have put up yours. I am always cocked and primed for just such emergencies as this, and you had better not try it on again with me or something may drop.

"I am meek and I'm lowly in spirit and mien,  
 I'm as mild as a zephyr of morn;  
 I'm a lamb, I'm a kitten, when all is serene,  
 But alive when you tread on my corn."

Again the crowd greeted his nonsense with applause, and the bullwhacker, seeing that he had the worst of it, thrust his revolver back into his belt.

"That's boss sense," cried the woman with whom the poet had danced. "Better let it drop, Knocker-out, since it was my fault, anyhow, and not this man's. He seems ter be boss of the 'casion."

"Ef I let et drop now et's only 'cause I have ter do et," the man growled.

"Wise man to see and own it," the poet remarked. "Some men can't see when a thing is right before their eyes. Now, I'm willing to let it pass and be good friends if you are. What do you say to that?"

"Come, let us bury the hatchet down deep,  
 The war-club sink into the mud;  
 Come, let us cover contention a heap,  
 Nor thirst for each other's blood."



Again did the poet's doggerel foolishness tickle the throng, and even the bullwhacker had to smile.

Just then, too, a new-comer upon the scene lent aid in restoring peace and saving the bad man of the camp further defeat and disgrace.

The new-comer was Fly Fan.

"Hello!" she exclaimed in a cheery way, "what's the trouble here? Not in a pickle, are you, Poet? If so, one good turn deserves another, and I'll try to help you out. What is it?"

"Oh, it is nothing, fair lady," assured the poet, bowing. "Just a little misunderstanding with this gentleman regarding a dance, that is all. It is all over now, I trust, and I have just offered him the right hand of good-fellowship. Will you accept it, sir?"

"I reckon I mought as well," said the bullwhacker, sheepishly. "Et would be a durn shame to kill a poic, anyhow. I'll let up on ye this time, but see that ye don't do et again."

He gave his hand, with that, and thus they made up while the crowd renewed its laughter.

The trouble ended, the music struck up, and the bullwhacker claiming his turn with Slickery Sal, away they went in the dizzy whirl of a wabbling waltz.

"Do you dance, fair lady?" asked the poet of Fly Fan.

"I can fling my feet a little, you bet," was the prompt response.

"And would you crush me with the weight of your scorn were I to ask you to dance with me?"

"Of course not. I'm out for a little fun, and I'm going to have it, so just catch on if you want me to make your head swim."

The poet bowed his thanks, and they joined the dancers.

The on-lookers could not but admire Fly Fan, whose every movement was full of grace, and the other women in the place looked upon her with envy.

She was hardly of their kind, however. Her face was fresh and fair, with nothing of the signs of dissipation so common to the female habitue of such resorts in your Western camp.

At the ending of the dance she and the poet parted company, the poet making her a bow that might have caused the shades of Chesterfield to pale with envy.

No sooner had they parted than no less a page than Onway Woodworth, the mine-manager, was at the girl sport's side.

"May I have the honor of the next dance with you?" he politely asked.

The girl gave him a searching glance.

"Who are you?" she inquired.

"My name is Woodworth; I'm manager of the Grub-stake Mine at this place."

"A mine-manager, eh? Well, I don't mind; you'll have to let me rest up a little, first."

"Certainly; let's sit down here. Shall I call or wine?"

"Not for me, sir. I never touch it."

"You are a queer one."

"I am a fly one."

"I can't understand you, though."

"Yes you can, too; I'll make you understand me, sir."

"Well?"

"I am here for a little fling of innocent fun; nothing more and nothing less. That's all there is to it."

"I must say again you are a queer one. I take it you are something of a sport; am I right?"

"Well, I am as fond of sport as the next one, I agree with you; that is, innocent sport. Now there was my dance with the poet; that was just fun alive for me."

"Say, though, was there anything in the charge that fellow made against you at the hotel?"

"What fellow?"

"Why, Prestley, of the Minnie Mine."

"You mean the fellow who wanted to claim me as his wife?"

"Exactly; you know well enough."

"All there was in it was in his mind, sir. I never saw him before in my life, that I'm aware of."

"Yet he seemed positive about it."

"Can't help that, he was on the wrong track, sure. I'm not his lost Mary, by a long ways. I'm neither lost, strayed nor stolen."

"Then do I understand that you are a young lady?"

"Do I look to be an old one?"

"Oh, come, now, you know what I mean. you a maid?"

"Now that's my secret, sir," laughing. "If I tell you all about myself there would be more mystery."

"Tell me, then, and let me know whether you are maid, wife or widow."

"And how would you know I had told you the truth? It's just as well to say nothing, and let you settle it in your mind to suit yourself."

"But, suppose I made a mistake?"

"Oh, that wouldn't matter; I could stand it if you could. Just call me Fly Fan, and let it go at that. But, say, do you want to amuse me?"

"I'm willing to try it, if you'll tell me how I can do it."

"Easy told. I have heard something about a severed head that was found here to-day. Will you tell me all about that?"

"With pleasure, far as there is anything to tell."

"Then please do so, and you'll find me a good listener. I always take interest in anything that is horrible."

The mine-manager then gave her an account of the case as he knew it.

"Well, that's the queerest thing I ever heard of," Fly Fan commented, when he had done.

"And who is this young lady who recognized it?"

"I have told you all there is to tell about her."

"And you have interested me in her. I believe I'll drop around and see her to-morrow, and see if I can be of any use to her."

"You will find her just what I have said of her, a pure and innocent little thing; one who works hard in a plain and homely way. I hardly know whether she will take kindly to you or not."

"Why so?"

"She is careful of her company. None of the girls who frequent these places can come near her. She has made friends with some of the married women of the camp."

"Good for her. But, she'll take to me fast enough, I'll bet on that. Virtue is quick to recognize virtue, you know."

This was said so bewitchingly that the hard-headed mine-manager scarcely knew how to take it. He was already more than captivated by the beautiful *incognita*.

"I hope that will be the case," he rejoined, "but if she hears you have spent the evening in the Silver Saloon I am afraid she will doubt you."

"Want to bet something on it?"

"No; I hope you are right."

"Thank you. But, what is this you tell me about a detective having been sent for to examine into the mystery? Who is the detective to be?"

"He is called Deadwood Dick, Junior."

"Is it possible! Then I stand a chance of meeting him here if I remain."

"I take it you desire to meet him."

"You are right, and I don't deny it. I have heard a good deal about him, and I hope he won't disappoint me."

"I can tell you one important thing about him, if you do not know it."

"And what is that, pray?"

"He is married."

"Oh, that is nothing to me. I suppose you are the same, yet I do not hesitate to pass a pleasant moment in your society."

"And maybe you are the same."

"I'll leave you to guess that for yourself, sir. I'm ready for your dance, now, if you are."

The music had just changed to an enticing air, and the mine-manager promptly led his charming chance acquaintance out upon the floor.

Woodworth was a man past the prime of life, but he was a gay old buck, as one man made remark, and could dance quite as well as a good many of the younger ones, and the dance went off nicely.

When it was done he had some further conversation with the girl sport, and when, finally, she spoke about returning to the hotel to retire, he insisted upon seeing her safely there; a privilege which she accorded him. If she had set out with the express purpose of captivating him she could not have succeeded better.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A STRANGE INTERVIEW.

ON the following morning the camp resumed its wonted every-day tenor.

The holiday had been a success in every way, save for the one gloomy feature of the funeral, and everybody had enjoyed a good time.

The mines opened for business as usual, though they were short-handed from the fact that a good many men were hardly in fit condition for

work, owing to their having celebrated too largely.

It was pretty late in the forenoon when Fly Fan made her appearance. Having been up late on the previous night, she had evidently seized the opportunity for indulging in a late "beauty" sleep in the morning.

When she appeared on the street she looked as fresh as a lark, and was as neat and tidy as she could be. And she set out for a little walk up the valley in the direction of the pass, alone, and on her return made inquiry for the shanty occupied by Little Maggie.

She was shown to it, and knocked at the door.

It was opened to her by the pale-faced little lady, whose eyes showed plainly the much weeping she had done.

"Are you Little Maggie?" Fly Fan asked.

"That is what I am called," was the answer, sadly.

"And you do sewing?"

"Yes, when I can get it to do."

"Well, would you mend the lining of my jacket for me? I could do it myself, but have nothing to sew with."

"I will mend it for you, certainly. Come in."

So, Fly Fan entered, closing the door after her.

She then took off her dainty jacket, the vest coming with it—being a part of the garment.

Underneath was disclosed a perfect body waist to her dress, and she looked all the more sweetly womanly without the coat and vest. The neat collar, tie and white bosom became her well.

The jacket, though new, showed a rip in one of the lining seams, and any one of a suspicious turn of mind might have thought it had been ripped on purpose.

Perhaps it had!

"Sit down while I mend it," the young girl invited. "It will not take me so very long."

"Yes, I'll sit down, Miss Meadway," the girl sport assented, "for I want to talk with you while you work."

"You knew my name?"

"Nothing strange about that, since it is known to everybody here."

"No, of course not."

"You look as though you have been weeping. I have heard of your sorrow of yesterday, and being a woman myself I can sympathize with you."

"It was all a terrible shock to me."

"Yes, it must have been. But, are you sure it was your father's head?"

"Oh, yes, there could be no mistake about that. I would have known his face anywhere and under any circumstances."

"And what will you do now?"

"I have been trying to think what to do. I will remain here till I have laid by some money, first of all."

"You are making money, then?"

"Yes, quite fast, for the men will insist upon paying me big prices for my work for them, whether or no."

"Which is very good of them. And then, when you have saved some money, what do you think you will do? Have you thought it out yet?"

"I think, but I am not sure, that I will go to Chicago, where I must have some relations living, if I can find them."

"Your father's people?"

"No; my mother's."

"Then had your father no relations left?"

"Not one, I believe. He was the last of the family; or at any rate so I always understood."

"And has he left you nothing?"

"No; he was very poor."

"And he was out of his mind, I have heard."

"Yes; his business troubles turned his mind. Poor papa! He was once very rich indeed."

"Is that so?"

"Yes; but, somehow, it all got away from him, and I do not think he ever understood how it was."

"Was his property in Chicago?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about it, Miss Meadway. I am interested, and I may be able to befriend you in some way."

"But, I do not know you."

"Do I look like a person you could trust?"

"You look to be good and true; I certainly hope you are."

"I will tell you this, that I have never done anything yet that need cause an honorable woman a blush."

The eyes of the girl sport met those of the sewing girl frankly and fearlessly as she said this, and for a moment their gaze remained steadfast.

"I am sure I want to believe that," said the



sewing girl, dropping her gaze upon her work.  
"There is some reason, then, why you cannot do so?"

"I have heard about you this morning. The women—I don't want to hurt your feelings, I am sure, but the women do not speak well of you."

"Why?"

"They have heard that you danced in the Silver Saloon last night with the rough men."

"They have not been misinformed; I did do that."

"And yet you say you have never done anything to be ashamed of. I would not enter the doors of such a place."

"And you are right. Neither would I, did I not have business there, and were I not well protected. What I witnessed there made my heart sick within me, I can tell you truly."

"How am I to believe that?"

"I may be able to convince you; indeed, I think I can."

"How?"

The girl sport leaned forward and said some words in a whisper—words which caused the other to start and stare at her.

"Is it possible?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, both possible and true, Miss Meadway."

"Then I will trust you, and will tell you what you have asked."

"Do so, and then, as I said, I may be able to be of service to you—yes, I am sure I can be."

"Well, the story is short and simple. My father, when I was a child, was a rich man in Chicago. Suddenly his wealth was swept away from him, and almost immediately on top of that calamity my mother died. I can just remember these events."

"Poor child!"

"Taking me with him, my father wandered away; and together we roamed far and wide, I his only companion and he my only friend and protector in all the wide, wide world. We were everything to each other in those days, and, indeed, till the end came when he left me suddenly in one of his mad spells—for he was out of his mind, as you say you have heard."

"Yes, I know that, dear."

"It was at a camp further west than this, or further north; anyhow, a long way from here. He had been worse than usual, and suddenly he disappeared and I never saw him again until I saw his dead face yesterday."

She broke down and wept.

"And you are sure there was no mistake about your recognition, are you?" the girl sport again urged.

"Oh, I am very sure on that point. Do you not suppose I would recognize beyond doubt the dearest face in the world to me?"

"I cannot doubt it."

"Well, that is all, then; that is the whole story."

"If that is all, then, will you permit me to ask some questions of you?"

"Why, yes, certainly; and I'll be only too glad to answer them, for now I am sure I may trust you."

"You need not doubt me, though others may do so. Did you ever hear your father mention any names in any of his mad musings? That is to say, the names of any persons who had wronged him in the past, or against whom he held a grudge?"

"Yes, I heard some names come up when he would sit and brood, but he was never able to tell me a connected story."

"Do you remember the names?"

"Yes; the name Pelmont was one that became very familiar to me in that way."

"But, you never knew who Pelmont was?"

"No."

"Well, I am going to make a strange proposition to you, Miss Meadway."

"And what is that?"

"I must see this dead face, the face of the person you are sure was your lost father. See here, do you recognize this?"

The girl sport took a card photograph from her pocket as she spoke, and held it before the girl's eyes.

"Mercy! It is my father!"

"And this is the same face you saw yesterday?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Then I am puzzled, utterly, and I must see that face for myself. Will you bring it to pass so that I may?"

"How can I do it?"

"Very easily. Every man here is your friend, and the mayor would do your slightest bidding. Tell him you must see the face once again, to be quite sure of the identity, and have them take it up."

"It is horrible! I do not know whether I could stand it or not! I will do it, though, though it kill me."

"I would spare you if I could, but I do not see the way. What I want most to do is to take a photograph of that face, to compare it with this photograph at my leisure."

"Well, well, I will do it. I will do it this afternoon."

"Good. I will be here—No, that will not do, either. I tell you I will be on hand at the Cemetery. I do not believe it was your father's head at all, Miss Meadway."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE POET'S QUIET "LAY."

THE fighting poet had in the mean time been conducted to the office of the *Rustler*, by Editor Sneed, where he was informed more in detail what was required of him on the staff.

"First, he must uphold the honor of Roundabout to the best of his ability, at the same time disparaging the rival camp of Rustleville and the contemporary sheet published there. Then he must puff up local advertisers, and slip in a good word here and there for paying subscribers."

The poet set to work at once, and in a little time had dashed off enough of his alleged poetry to fill all the available space of the next issue of the paper, and more.

And while he was thus engaged, the editor was writing up the events of the previous day, plodding with his task slowly and laboriously.

"Well, there you are," said the poet, when he had done; "enough to do you for one issue. If any of it won't do, let me know and I'll put it through the mill again. I desire to please, you know."

The editor had laid down his pen, and he glanced over the effusions of his new man.

"It will do, it will do," he presently said. "We'll knock them out this time, sure enough. I'm going to give you a puff as soon as I get this leader off my hands."

"All right, but don't rub it on too thick, if you please. I'm modest, you know, and can't stand it. Afterward, after the paper is out, I mean, if I am killed for my rhymes, please see that I'm laid away under the willow's shade."

"Oh, give me a chamber about six feet,  
And four or five feet under ground;  
And stow me away in a boot-box neat,  
Then round up on top a neat mound."

"Yes, I'll see to all that," the editor promised, laughing. "But, little danger that you will come to grief, for the worst men around will respect you after the showing you made last night."

"I hope they will."

"If you are going out, now, and you should get hold of any newsy news, don't fail to make a report of it."

"Oh, no, I won't miss anything of importance. Being on your staff, I'll do all I can to make the *Rustler* rustle, you can bet."

So, the poet went forth from the sanctum, leaving the editor to the task of finishing his great leader, while the one typesetter of the establishment picked pi.

He sauntered idly about the street for a little time, but presently turned his face in the direction of the Choke and bent his steps toward Hustleville. He was going to see the rival camp.

Arriving there, he was recognized by some who had seen him on the previous night, and who now pointed him out to others, and he was an object of much interest.

Making his way to the Rocky Gulch House, he entered there.

And there the first man he fell in with happened to be Editor Dobby, of the *Hustler*.

"Hello!" that gentleman greeted. "Have you tired already of that miserable place on the other side of the Choke? Have you come over here to get into good society and be somebody?"

"Well, not exactly that," was the slow response. "I have come over to take a look around, that is all."

"And I don't believe you'll go back, if you have good taste and know a good place when you see it."

"What is your chief attraction here?"

"Our chief attraction! Why, sir, are you not aware that the *Hustler* is published here? Do you not know that we have the only cemetery in the gulch? What can Roundabout show to compare with these?"

"Drawing cards, I suppose, though I have never seen them. I suppose all who are drawn to the cemetery come to stay, do they not?"

"That's a poor joke, if you mean it for one."

"Yes, I suppose it is. But, I am a stranger here, suppose you take me out and show me around a little."

"I'll do it willingly. Come on."

Mr. Dobby led the way, and conducted the stranger first to his office, where he told of the merits of his paper in glowing terms.

Then followed a visit to the cemetery, and the guide pointed out the graves one after another, giving a brief history of each sleeper therein and stating the cause of each one's demise.

With only two exceptions, every one of the "plants" had died with his boots on—accounted somewhat of an honor.

"And where's the grave of that head?" asked the poet.

"Right over there. It wasn't a full size plant, you see, and we made up a mound in proportion in the form of an ant-hill."

"Looks as if he had been planted standing up, and the hole hadn't been quite deep enough, don't it? What do you think about that case, anyhow?"

"Don't know what to think about it. I'm not going to bother my head much with it till the detective gets here. Then maybe something will be done, but I doubt it."

"Think he won't be equal to the case, eh?"

"I don't see how he's going to be, do you?"

"No; but that don't signify anything. I'm like you—can't puzzle my brain with it."

"If it were poetry I'd spin it;

As it is, I am not in it."

"You can make up rhymes the easiest of anybody I ever heard of. Wish I could do it. I tried to get up a verse or two once about Roundabout, but after working on the thing for half a day I gave it up."

"What was it stuck you?"

"Why, I couldn't find anything to chime in with Mayor Gadzooks."

"Is that so? Why, seems to me that ought to be possible. Let's see if I can hit something off-hand:

"There is Mayor Gadzooks,

He never had spooks.

He's a gentleman right up in G;

Though his cordial he takes,

He has never seen snakes.

An all-around Rustler is he."

"Well I'm darned! Why couldn't I think of had spooks? But, blast it, your stuff is all in favor of Roundabout; I wanted somethin' that would show 'em up bad."

"Well, that's so, I allow."

"Tell you what I'll do."

"What's that?"

"You come to my sanctum and write up a few verses that will make 'em sick over there, and I'll give you a dollar."

"Sir! Think you that you can buy pearls of great price with trifles? That is almost an insult, sir! Would you thus cheapen my talent? By my beard—when it grows! but I'll shake the dust of your camp from my feet—"

"There, there, don't get roiled; that shows how little I know about poetry. I'll make it a dollar and a half—"

"Worse and worse! But, sir, you are too late, anyhow, for I am engaged up n the staff of the *Roundabout Rustler*, at a salary worthy my hire, so I could not serve you anyhow."

"You are on the *Rustler*! I thought Sneed laughed at you last night when you tried to engage."

"He says that was only a bluff to get you out of the way."

"Curse him for the double-faced villain he is. I'll tell you what, I'll pay you just double what he has offered you, if you will come with me, and I don't care how much it is, either."

"Not now, sir, not now; I shall first have to break off with him honorably. You can see how it is. Then, anyhow, maybe I'll be hanged at short notice when the paper comes out, if the citizens are not prepared for the poetic gems it has in store for them."

"For I've handled some things with a caustic pen, With vinegar and gall for ink; It may take all right: if it doesn't, why then, I shall get a hemp necktie, I think."

"But, say, do me one favor."

"What is that?"

"Just repeat that what you got off about Gadzooks. I'll twist it somehow to give him one jab, and I'll pay you for it besides."

"Impossible, sir. Gems once dropped are gone for aye. You'll have to rake it out of your memory if you want to make use of it. By the way, I find it is dinner time; do you think they'll feed me at the hotel here?"

"I meant to ask you to dine with me, but now



hang me if I will. You have cast your lot with the Rustlers, and you had better get back to them again, for you might get a deadly dose of poison here. I wouldn't disgrace my paper with any of your rotten verses anyhow!"

"My dear sir," cried the poet, "you do not know what pain it gives me if I have injured you by word or act of mine. I hoped at least to be friends with you. I freely pardon you for the abuse you heap upon my poetic gems. Let us make up and be friends, good sir, or—"

"I shall weep aloud in my anguish sore,  
And madly I'll tug at my hair;  
Or I'll plunge my soul in the flowing bowl,  
And go gunning for reptiles rare."

In spite of himself, Editor Dubby had to laugh, and he said:

"A man couldn't be mad with you if he wanted to, for you are the driest cuss I ever met. There goes the gong; come and take dinner with me, anyhow."

"Mean it?"

"Yes."

"All right, I'll do it, and I'll give you a puff in the *Rustler* next week in spite of rules."

So, having made up, they went together to the hotel, where the editor escorted his distinguished guest into the dining-room, where the other hungry boarders were already gathering round the board.

The poet seemed to be taking particular note of them all, and was quietly interested in Aaron Prestley and Edmund Murtagh, especially.

The conversation was general, and the poet enlivened it once in awhile with a gem of doggerel.

"By the way," he presently asked, when there was a pause, "has any of you gentlemen ever heard of a man named Pelmont anywhere in these parts?"

He was looking at the mayor of the camp as he put the question, but he was eying all the others as well, and he noted that Edmund Murtagh looked up quickly and fixed his eyes upon him.

"No, don't think I ever have heard of a feller o' that name," the mayor said. "What for a looker was he?"

"Oh, a young chap; I met him once at another camp and took a liking to him."

Murtagh removed his gaze with a look of relief.

## CHAPTER X.

### SCORING A SECRET POINT.

THE fighting poet, needless to say, had been playing a quiet part, hiding his real object under his innocent nonsense.

He had now gained a point, yet no one was the wiser, for nothing in his outward manner revealed anything of his inward thoughts. He was what he seemed, a mildly mad rhymester run to seed.

After dinner he was on the piazza, having parted with Dubby of the *Hustler*, who had excused himself, having work to do; when Edmund Murtagh accosted him.

"So, you are a poet, eh?" he said.

"I am so called," was the mild response.

"Well, you're the first one I have ever seen."

"And do I meet your ideal?"

The poet assumed his prettiest pose, as he asked that, and awaited the verdict.

"Yes, I guess you do," was the return. "You have the long hair, the languid air, and the shabby appearance in general—not meaning any insult."

"Insult! You have paid me a compliment."

"But, I wanted to ask you something, Sir Poet."

"And what is that? You have only to put the query."

"What about that person whom you asked about at the table?"

"You refer to Pelmont?"

"Yes."

"Why, nothing about him, except that I should like to meet him again."

"What sort of a fellow was he? I have known persons by that name, and maybe I have known him."

"Likely enough, sir. Why, he was a young chap, rather a wild one, too, and one who was free and easy when under drink—for he was a drinker. But, a good-natured fellow withal."

"No, hardly think I ever met him, then. Don't happen to know where he hailed from, do you?"

"No, I do not, sir."

"That's all, then; guess the fellow was never known to me."

Some further remarks were exchanged, then, when Aaron Prestley came up, and the pair were

about leaving the piazza when something drew their attention.

This something was a party coming toward the camp from the direction of the Choke.

There were two women and quite a number of men.

"Hello! what's the meaning of this visit?" cried the Mayor of Hustleville.

"Who are they?" asked Murtagh.

"People of Roundabout, I take it."

"So they are," cried Prestley. "There, Murtagh, is the girl!"

The new-comer at the camp gave a frown as he looked at the mine-manager, and the latter bit his lip.

All of which the poet noted, while he did not appear to do so.

"Yas, et's ther gal they call Little Maggie," said the mayor. "Wonder what it is brings 'em over hyer to-day? They was here to bury ther gal's daddy yesterday; or anyhow his head."

"And they appear to be heading for the cemetery," suggested the manager.

"That's so, an' I reckon I'll make et my business ter find out what they ar' after to-day."

And with that the mayor set out to meet them.

The poet stepped apart from the manager and his companion, and appeared to be deeply interested in watching the coming party.

"What do you suppose it means?" he heard Murtagh ask.

"I don't know," was the mine-manager's response. "We'll have to wait and see what they do."

"Yes, I suppose so. They are here on business of some sort, however, that is plain enough."

"So I think, too."

"Suppose we walk out that way," Murtagh suggested.

"All right, and that will give you a chance to get a look at the young thing you intend—"

A nudge from the other caused him to stop in what he was saying, and Murtagh cast a look in the direction of the poet, who was intently watching the coming visitors to the camp.

"I believe I'll go with them," the poet remarked, as if speaking to himself. "I always like to learn the news, and now that I am on the staff of the *Rustler* it is my duty to be on the lookout for items for my paper."

And with that he set out, the others right after him.

"What's that you say?" demanded Prestley. "You are on the *Rustler*?"

"Yes; I hold the post of poet laureate on that journal, sir; a post which I hope to fill with credit to myself and honor to the concern."

"You'll fill it with something, I have no doubt. I'll be anxious to see the next number."

"You will find it a perfect souvenir of poetic pearls, I assure you."

"I don't doubt it, sir."

The mayor was just ahead of them, and presently he met the party as they came near to the cemetery.

"What d'ye want hyer?" Mayor Kreeps demanded.

"We have come on a little matter o' business," answered Mayor Gadzooks. "We want to dig up that head again fer another look at et."

"What's that for?"

"Well, you see, it's like this: Sence yesterday this hyer young lady has been thinkin' over et quietly, an' she wants another look at et when she's more calm ter be sure thar ain't no mistake."

"Wasn't ye sure yesterday, miss?"

"I thought I was, sir, but I want to be very sure. I hope you will not refuse me."

Prestley and Murtagh had come up by this time, as well as the poet, and they heard all that was said.

"No, I don't reckon we'll refuse ye," answered Kreeps, "but we want ther people of Roundabout to understand that they don't own no share in this hyer sammytarry, even if they do bury in et—free gratis fer nothin' now."

"Oh, that's understood," averred Gadzooks.

"We don't own no more here than you do in our new fire-engine."

"Ar' you think that fire-engine is someshakes, don't ye?"

"Well, we jest do, neighbor."

"An' I s'pose we'll never hear the end of et, till we get somethin' that will put et out o' sight, an' that's what we ar' goin' ter do."

"What are you goin' to get?"

"You'll see."

"Yes, I s'pose we will. But, we'll talk that over some other time; we ar' hyer on business now, as I said."

They passed on and entered the cemetery, which was inclosed in a neat fence which the proud citizens of Hustleville had built around it.

There they went straight to the little mound under which the severed head reposed, and one of the party proceeded to dig for it, the others standing idly by in waiting.

Little Maggie did not look up, but stood with her back to the worker.

Her face was pale and her fists clinched; that it was a trying moment for her, all could see.

Fly Fan was there, armed with a peculiar little box, as it looked to be, and she talked with the orphaned girl in low tones while they waited.

The poet in the long black coat stood silent, watching the proceeding like a gaunt raven from some Stygian shore. What his thoughts were, none might guess. He was not watching the worker only, however.

It took some little time to get down to the box and lift it out, but it was done finally, and the head was removed and set upon the box in plain sight of all.

"Now, miss," urged the Mayor of Roundabout, "take a good look at et this time, an' make up your mind. It will be foolish ter take et up again, ye know. Brace yerself, now, an' look."

Little Maggie was seen to shiver, and it was a moment before she obeyed.

Then she turned and looked for some seconds at the dead face—steadily, her own face almost as pale.

And while she looked, Fly Fan, standing a little back from the others, aimed her peculiar little box at the hideous object and something was heard to give a slight click.

She had photographed it!

The girl took plenty of time looking upon the dead features of the face she had once decided was that of her father, and finally turned sadly away, covering her face with her hands.

"Ar' ye done?" asked the mayor, not unkindly.

"Yes, sir; I am satisfied now."

"An' ye ar' sure et was your father?"

"I do not see any chance for any mistake, sir."

The poet, who was slyly watching Murtagh and Prestley, saw a look of momentary exultation upon the face of the first mentioned.

"Then bury the head again," the mayor directed. "We're much 'bliged ter you, Mayor Kreeps. Ther pore leetle gal wanted et done, an' nobody could refuse her, ye know."

"No, that's so; I wouldn't refuse Little Maggie."

The girl had started back toward the gate, and Fly Fan followed quickly after her and caught up with her.

"Your heart is almost broke, poor child," she murmured.

"Yes, yes, for now I am sure it is my father's head. I was sure before."

"But, hearken to me, Maggie; I am just as sure it is *not* your father's head. Yes, I mean it. I do not understand the mystery yet, but I mean it. It is not the head of Joel Meadway."

"Oh, if I could only be sure of that!"

"Have courage, and it shall be made plain to you ere long. Meantime, breathe not what I have spoken, but let it be thought that the question is settled for all time, and that it was indeed his head that was found."

"Yes, yes, I will keep silent; and it will be easy to do so, for it will take much to convince me that you are right. Only one thing will convince me."

"And that will be to have your father restored to you alive and well."

"Yes, yes. Nothing else will convince me."

"Then do not despair, my dear!"

And so talking, they made their way back again to Roundabout, the poet returning with the party and entering the office of the *Hustler*.

## CHAPTER XI.

### PROPOSAL AND COMPACT.

IT was later in the day, and Little Maggie was busy with her sewing and all alone in her shanty, when there came a rap at the door.

There was nothing surprising about that, for she had callers at all hours of the day, so she bade the applicant come in.

The door swung open, and Mr. Edmund Murtagh entered.

"Good afternoon, Miss Meadway!" he greeted, doffing his hat and making her a polite bow.

"Good afternoon, sir!" she responded, civilly.

"I am told that you do mending, and have come to see if you would do some for me."

"Yes, I can do it, sir; but I cannot promise



to have it done to-morrow, for I have a good deal of work on hand just now."

"Oh, that does not matter: any time during the week will answer me. Here are the things in this bundle, and I will leave it with you and call again for it in a couple of days."

"Very well, sir."

"But, that wasn't all of my errand, Miss Meadway."

She looked at him in a questioning manner.

"No; I want to talk with you a few minutes, if you do not object. You are the child of Joel Meadway, I believe."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, your father was once one of my very best friends."

"Indeed! What is your name? Maybe I have heard him speak of you at some time or other in the past."

"My name is Edmund Murtagh."

"No, I do not think I ever heard your name, sir."

"Well, that does not signify anything, for I am told your father went out of his mind."

"Yes, that is true, he did."

"If you will give me leave to do so I will sit down for a minute or two while we talk."

"You may do so, sir."

"Thanks. Now, Miss Meadway, I saw you for the first time over at Hustleville awhile ago, and I was interested in you at sight, and the more so when I learned who you were."

She did not respond.

"Yes, for your father was a man I loved and respected."

"I am glad to hear that, sir."

"It is the truth. Now tell me, Miss Meadway, what are your circumstances? Is there anything I can do for my old friend's child?"

"Thank you, but I am doing nicely, sir. I need no help from any one, for I am making a good living and more besides. I thank you very kindly for your interest all the same."

"Ahem! You are welcome, of course. But, miss, that is not what I am trying to get at yet. I am a blunt man, and you must excuse my blunt ways. When I saw you for the first time to-day I had an interest in you—a keen interest, I will say, and then when I learned your name I was interested all the more."

"You told me that before."

"Yes, but I have not told you all yet. Do not look uneasy now, for I am here as a friend with only the best intentions toward you. When I saw you, said I to myself—There is the one little woman in the world I can love, and if I find she is a good body and worthy of me I'm going to try to win her."

"No, no, do not interrupt me, please, but hear me out. That was just what I did say to myself, and that was before I knew who or what you were. Then when I came to learn that you were the child of my old friend, and that you were all alone in the world, I made up my mind to come here and offer you my protection in the most perfect way possible."

"Miss Meadway, I am well off in this world's goods, and I have a name not to be ashamed of. I loved you at sight, as I have told you. Now, for the sake of the friendship between your dead father and me I want you to be my wife, and I will be both father and husband to you. What do you say? But, I won't press you for the answer so soon; just think it over, and when I come again you can tell me. You'll find those clothes don't need much mending; that was my excuse for coming here, just to break the ice, you know."

The girl had been staring at him with dilated eyes, her lips parted, but had been unable to speak.

"Why, sir, you have amazed me," she now gasped.

"I don't doubt it, I don't doubt it a bit, Miss Maggie; but, just think it over quietly and then give me my answer."

"I can give you the answer now, sir, just as well—"

"No, no, I will not have it now; I want you to take time to think it over carefully. The offer I have made you is an honorable one, and you will find that I am a true and honest man. If you can bring yourself to marry me, I will take you away from here at once and give you a home with every comfort. Now, now, do not say a word, but take plenty of time to think it over. I do not want you to refuse me, of course; neither do I want you to consent too hastily. Just think it over till I come again, and then let me know your decision. Good-afternoon."

He had bowed himself to the door as he finished, and with that he opened the door and was gone.

When the door was closed after him the girl could only stare at it blankly for some time.

She had considered herself little more than a child, and such a proposition from such a man had fairly taken away her breath.

"I was never so frightened in my life," she said to herself, and she trembled as she said it. "It may all be true, what he has said, but I fear him. His face does not please me."

Great was her relief when the door opened again in a few minutes and Fly Fan came in.

"You have had a visitor?" she asked.

"Yes, and a big fright, too."

"Your face shows it. What happened?"

"Why, that man asked me to marry him!"

"Rather sudden, I should think."

"Yes, indeed! Why, I would not think of such a thing, even were I old enough to marry."

"You are near eighteen, are you not?"

"Yes, quite near that age."

"And many girls marry younger, though I should think twenty-two plenty young enough. But, I am not here to begin a philosophical argument. You never saw this man before, did you?"

"Not before I saw him at the cemetery."

"And what excuse did he make for his sudden offer?"

"Oh, he said he loved me at sight, and when he learned who I was he made up his mind to marry me if he could; saying my father and he had been dear friends."

"That was it, eh? Let us see, then. He was at the cemetery when that head was taken up, but he did not make any demonstration over it, did he? If you recognized it as your father's, why did he not recognize it?"

"I never thought of that."

"And what answer did you make him?"

"He would not let me make any; he told me to take time to think about it, and not answer in haste."

"Generous of him, was it not? And what is your answer going to be?"

"It is going to be No, of course. I would never marry him under any circumstances, for he has an evil face. I could not love him, even if I owed my life to him for any cause."

"And you will tell him so, of course."

"Yes; I shall send back his bundle unopened, and request him not to come here again. If he comes, then I must speak very plainly to him."

"That's a good plan, but it must not be carried out."

"Why not?"

"Because I want you to work it another way."

"Why, what can you mean? I cannot understand you. Surely you do not expect me to say yes to him!"

"No, not at all; but you can delay a little, and so keep him in a state of uncertainty. Mend his garments, if they need it, and when he comes just put him off for some days."

"But, that is deception, and I do not like it."

"It is not half so bad as the deception he is playing with you. After what I have told you I am sure you ought to trust me."

"Yes, yes, I do trust you, and will do as you say."

"Good. Then, too, such a plan will be the better for your personal safety. While he thinks there is a hope of your giving willing consent he will not be likely to use force."

"What? do you think he would try that?"

"I am sure of it. But, keep these things very secret for the present, Miss Meadway. We must work carefully, and no one must suspect. I would not have told you anything, but I had to win your confidence somehow."

"Well, I will be guided by you and will do just as you say; but, I have one great reason to doubt you still."

"And what is that?"

"Why you told me you felt sure it was not my father's head we saw to-day; I am sure it must have been."

"I cannot blame you for your belief, for the face was near enough like your lost father's to deceive you. But, I will tell you more, now. I positively know it was not your father's head."

"Oh! how do you know it? If that is only true!"

"I see I must give you what you ask, and knowing I may trust you, I will do so."

And with that, Fly Fan told a brief story in a low voice.

When she had done, the face of the little sewing girl was bright with hope renewed.

"Oh! I am so glad—so glad!" she cried.

"Now you may tell me to do anything you will, and I'll do it, for I am sure you are my friend."

"Yes, you may trust me fully, Maggie, and I

hope you will. So, play with Mr. Murtagh as I have said, and let him think maybe you will not refuse him, and so hold him off for a time."

"Yes, yes, I will do that; I will do anything in the hope of again seeing my father alive and well. You may trust me now, fully. I will do my part."

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE POET LET LOOSE.

On the following day the current issue of the *Roundabout Rustler* made its appearance, and everybody was eager to get a copy.

On the previous evening the publisher had made a liberal scattering of flyers announcing the good things the paper had for its readers, and in that manner had whetted the public appetite.

He had boldly boasted how far superior *Roundabout* was to *Hustleville*, now, having a fire-engine; and how altogether beyond reach it had grown by the acquisition of a real, live poet; and not a common, every-day sort of poet, either, but a fighting poet.

In proof of his claims, he simply called attention to the *Rustler*.

So, when the paper appeared, it met with ready sale, and a man was found who, for ample consideration, was willing to take the risk of carrying a supply over into the rival camp.

The editor's leader was a whooper.

He recounted the great day's celebration upon the arrival of the new engine, and asked *Hustleville* why it did not wake up and keep abreast with the times. Then it told of the advent of a fighting poet, and boasted of having secured his services upon the *Rustler*.

Did space admit the quoting of the editorial, it would be found highly spicy reading.

This was merely an editorial, however.

On the first page was a full report of the doings of the great holiday, and many items of local interest, with here and there something from the pen of the fighting poet.

It was the first time either of the papers in the gulch had ventured into rhyme, and across the top of the first page was this line—

"DON'T FAIL TO READ THE POETRY IN

THIS ISSUE!"

And the first sample that fell under the eye of the reader was this—

### "ROUNDABOUT."

"Oh, a rollicking place is Roundabout Cit.,

With its whole-hearted citizens all;

There's no other city around about it,

Can hold a light to it at all.

And we have a mayor of whom we are proud,

He's a man just as big as he looks;

He's a tall rustler, proclaim to your crowd,

His first name is Gilbert Gadzooks.

We have a hotel here that cannot be beat,

The Silver Saloon is our boast;

If you're fond of dancing come try us a heat,

And pay your respects to your host.

We have a post-office, as you all know,

And now a steam fire-engine too;

Oh, we are the people, and that's why we crow;

We'll crow more before we are through.

And we have a newspaper right up in style,

One that is well worthy the name;

Just look it well over then ante your pile,

That we're on the *Rustler* for fame."

That seemed to strike the worthy citizens right where they lived, so to express it, and they were repeating the jingles to one another everywhere.

The fighting poet was voted a howling success, right from that time, and the whole camp was his for a song—literally.

To quote all his effusions were impossible.

One other ran thus:

### "SLICKERY SAL."

"Our Slickery Sal is a mighty fine gal,

From fetlocks right up to her ears;

She's without faults when you take her to waltz, I

She's a daisy for one of her years.

She's a dandy, you bet, and you never will get,

Far ahead of her in a fast reel;

She is light on the toe, and she whirls about so,

That you don't catch the clink of her heel."

Everybody was amused, and the papers went off like hot cakes, much to the delight of the proprietor.

But, there came a reaction by any by.

Over came Editor Dubby from *Hustleville*, mounted upon a mule, and he looked as though armed to do desperate carnage somewhere.

He halted before the door of the *Rustler* building, and called out:

"Come out here, you low-lived apology for a



poor bunch of pica pi, you! till I shoot some holes in you to let in some sense! And where's that poet? I'm on the trail for poets to-day, and I want him."

The first of Editor Sneed that was seen was the tube of a long rifle that came around the side of the door, and the editor followed it up.

"Here I am, neighbor," he said; "what's wanted? What's the meaning of all this abuse you have heaped upon me?"

"What's the meaning of it! I want to know what's the meaning of this!"

"The meaning of what?"

"This verse about my paper!"

"Well, read it out."

"And be laughed at for it! You know well enough what it is."

"I am not aware that anything has been inserted, sir, that calls for apology from us."

"You don't! What do you call this, then? Just listen!" And he read a couple of verses the poet had made up in ridicule of the *Rustler*.

The crowd laughed when he had done, but it was no laughing matter for Dubby, and he demanded satisfaction or blood, then and there. He had come there for one or the other, and meant to have it.

And while he was howling, over came the proprietor of the leading saloon of the rival camp.

He, too, set up a wild protest, and before he had done others had arrived.

What they demanded was the blood of that poet!

To this time that worthy had kept out of sight, but now he appeared, and with his cool and leisurely manner confronted the worthy denizens of the neighboring camp of Hustleville.

"What is it?" he asked. "What is the matter?"

"Enough is the matter, that's what it is," cried Mayor Kreeps, he too having been pricked by one of the doggerel darts.

"You complain of the verses I have written for my employer? What would you have me do? Should I take pay from the Rustlers to write booms for the Hustlers? Put yourselves in my place."

"That ain't got nothin' ter do with et," cried Kreeps. "You done et, and we means ter git satisfaction if we have to take et out of your hide."

"But, see the injustice, gentlemen. Had I been on the staff of the paper beyond the Choke, would I not have reversed things? Do not condemn me; I wrote to suit the ideas of my master."

"An' now you'll choke fer a fact, to satisfy us."

"Can't I beg off?" the poet cried. "Can't you let me down easy? Can't you find anything of consolation in what I have penned?"

"We'll let ye down with a jerk an' a run," cried Mayor Kreeps. "Find anything o' consolation? blast ye! Do ye think lines like these hyer ar' likely to console anybody?"

"So, our respects to Mayor Kreeps, Who, when he doesn't Kreepe he sleeps."

"What does that mean, anyhow?"

And so they raved, one after another, each quoting something the poet had said about him, while the Rustlers stood by laughing, ready to defend their poet to the last if need be.

That was just where the poet had the best of it, too; he knew he was safe; the men of Hustleville would not dare do him bodily harm.

"Good friends, good friends," he cried at last, "go home and keep the peace, and in our next I'll do you all proud."

"I'll do the very best I can,  
To say good things of every man."

So, seeing they could do nothing, with that they had to be satisfied, and taking hold upon that promise as their excuse for letting up, they gave the poet a lease of life in which to redeem himself.

This issue of the *Rustler* had made a hit, and the Hustlers were sore enough over it and they could not hide the fact.

Said one man:

"Et wouldn't been so bad, but he rubbed et on a leetle thicker'n we could bear et. An' then ther way he crowed up Roundabout made us feel et all ther more. I hope he'll do better next tim."

"But, gradually their anger cooled, and after they had visited the saloons with some of the boys of Roundabout, they felt better, and began to enjoy the thing in the right spirit.

There was one jingle in the paper, however, that few if any could understand, even if it

was meant that it should be understood in full.

And that was this:

"TO THE LOST HEAD.

"Tell us whose head it was, now if you can,  
Tell us who put it there, down in the pan.  
It is a mystery, vexing us sore;  
Who cut it off o' him who the head wore?  
Vile were the plotters, viler the plot;  
Sure is their fate to be, like it or not;  
Vengeance is after them, hot on the trail;  
See how they quake with fear! See how they quail!"

That was something that made the citizens of both camps wonder, and none was able to understand it in the full.

True, they all knew it meant the head that had been found in the box of the new engine; but, what did the poet know further than that?

There they were puzzled.

It was along about stage time when Aaron Prestley and Edmund Murtagh came over to the city, and finding the poet on the piazza of the hotel they accosted him.

"Say," said Prestly, "we have been reading your dashes in the *Rustler*, and they have taken well it seems; but, there is one nobody can understand. What were you trying to work off about that severed head?"

"Why, gentlemen, was it not plain enough?"

"It is not plain at all; nobody can get onto it. You hint at a plot and a murder, and all that."

"Ah! now I see where you are puzzled. You have allowed nothing for poetic license. The poet, as you know, is allowed to revel in the realms of imagination, and so round up the measure of his verse. That was what I did. Nothing in it when you look at it in the right light."

"Then it was just jingling nonsense, like all the rest?"

"To be sure. I hope you do not take me for a seer, who can read the stars, do you?"

#### CHAPTER XIII.

##### COMING OF THE DEPUTY.

WHEN the stage came into Roundabout that evening it had aboard a passenger of some importance, as was speedily found.

This was the night, by the way, on which the arrival of the great detective, Deadwood Dick, was looked for, provided he had been able to set out at once upon receipt of the summons.

And this being so, there was an unusually big crowd on hand.

All of Roundabout and a goodly share of Hustleville were on hand to see the stage come in.

"Hillo!" cried the driver, as he drew up in his usual artistic fashion in front of the Union Hotel, "what has broke loose hyer? Been havin' a hangin'-bee to-day?"

"Wull, no, not zackly," somebody responded; "we ar' hyer ter see ther stage come in, that's all."

"An' ye ar' out in full force, I sh'ud say."

"You bet."

"Might think ye was lookin' fer a prince, or somethin' like that."

"An' so we ar', too," spoke up Mayor Gad-zooks. "We ar' expectin' ther Prince of ther West."

"Ther who?"

"Ther Prince of ther West; that is ter say, Deadwood Dick, Junior."

The passengers were alighting, and just as this was said a young man of somewhat striking presence was seen.

He was well-dressed, and one who had a keen pair of eyes and who carried himself with something of a cool air.

The driver jerked his thumb in the direction of this man, saying:

"I wouldn't wonder a bit ef ye've got him."

The mayor stepped forward.

"Pardon, sir, but ar' you Deadwood Dick?"

"I have not that honor," was the reply. "I am, however, Deadwood Dick's deputy, with letters of introduction to the mayor of this camp and to the manager of the Grub-stake Mine."

"Then you ar' the man we want ter see. I am mayor of this city."

"You call it a city, eh? Well, a city it is, then. I suppose this is your chief hotel."

"Et ar' no slouch, sir. Come right in. This way, Manager Woodworth; hyer is our man—not Deadwood Dick himself, but his deputy."

The mayor led the way, the detective following him, and the whole crowd making effort to get at least one glimpse of the man who represented the great detective. He was a curiosity to their eyes.

"You kin register, of course," said the mayor, when they gained the bar-room, "but your stay here will be at our expense. We are men of blood, hyer, and we know how to do the right thing. Et mought be different over at Hustleville; but we ar' Rustlers hyer."

"I opine ther men o' Hustleville ar' jest as white as you be," chipped in the mayor of that camp.

"Rival camps, eh?" observed the detective, with a smile.

"Not at all, sir," spoke up Editor Sneed. "Our city is so far ahead that no chance for rivalry is possible. There is a good deal of envy from the other side, however."

"Jealousy, eh?"

"That's the word, sir."

"It is not so!" cried out Editor Dubby. "We stand at the head, in real and true merit. We have a newspaper, the best citizens, the best of everything else, and a cemetery to boot. A camp that can't show a cemetery, isn't much of a camp, as any fair-minded man will say."

"An apology for a newspaper, you mean," shouted Editor Sneed. "It cannot approach the *Rustler*. And then, too, we have a fire-engine here, and a poet—a real live poet, and a fighting poet at that! Sir, that little one-horse camp on the other side of the Choke is not to be compared with this growing city. Why, we are the acknowledged leader in every—"

"Not by a—"

"There, there," interrupted Manager Woodworth, "let it drop. This gentleman does not want to hear any more of this; besides, we have more important business on hand. Let it drop."

"Wise words wisely said," spoke up Poet Tension. "This is no time to fling dirt, good citizens. Sir," advancing and extending his hand to the detective, "let me welcome you here in a worthy way. I am the poet of whom mention has been made, much to my blush."

"We welcome you with heart and hand,  
We'll treat you like a king,  
You'll find us here a knightly band;  
You hear me what I sing."

The detective had given his hand, evidently not wanting to offend by refusing it, and the poet let it go as he ended.

"That was well done," the detective declared. "Citizens, have you got many more fellers of this kind running at large here?"

"No; he is the only one," said the mayor.

"Because I was going to say, if you have any more like him you will soon require a lunatic asylum."

This was greeted with howls of laughter by the men of Hustleville, and the poet struck an attitude expressive of supreme indignation.

"See my good intentions come to naught!" he cried. "Verily, and by my beard—when it grows—this is more than I can tamely stand! What then will I do? I will go quietly and sit down."

"For I am struck silly and utterly floored;  
My pins knocked from under me quite.  
I'll go hang my harp on the willer awhile,  
And keep still for the rest of the night."

And, while the room rung with laughter, he went quietly and took a seat.

No one could imagine that there had been an object in all this; that when the hand of the poet had clasped that of the detective a closely folded note had adhered to the latter's palm.

"I didn't mean to offend you, sir," the detective made half apology; "it was only in the way of a joke I said what I did."

The poet sadly shook his head, making no response.

"Well, enough of this," spoke up the mine-manager. "Register, sir, and have your supper, and then we will lay before you the business for which you have been called."

"Yes, I will do so, sir; and while I am registering you can read the letter I bear from Mr. Bristol—that is, Deadwood Dick."

As he spoke he drew a letter from his pocket and handed it to the mayor.

The mayor was the only one who had introduced himself as a person in authority as yet, and it was but natural the letter should go to him.

Furthermore, it was addressed to the mayor.

The detective turned at once to the register, then, and took up the pen, and the mayor passed the letter over to Mr. Woodworth, saying:

"Hyer, you can read better'n I can; you open ther dockymment and let's hear what ther great Richard has ter say. I reckon it's all right, seein' as he has sent a man in his place."

"Yes, it is all right, of course."

The manager took the letter and tore it open, and as soon as he had drawn forth the sheet it contained, read aloud:



"Bristol City, —, 18—.  
 "TO MAYOR GADZOOKS OF ROUNDABOUT, MINE MANAGER WOODWORTH, AND OTHERS:—  
 "Your summons has been received, and finding it impossible to answer your call owing to press of other business, I send a man in my place, one whom you may trust fully with whatever business you may have in my line. Give him as full an understanding of the case as possible, and then trust all to him. If it is a case that can be solved, he will solve it for you.  
 "Yours very truly,  
 "RICHARD M. BRISTOL."

"That speaks high for you, sir," declared the mayor, addressing the detective, who had now registered.

"I am glad Mr. Bristol can so well recommend me. He does not mention my name, I find. My name is Dolan Hardy. I recently left the regular service to attach myself to Mr. Bristol's staff."

This was true; the reader may remember the man, figuring in a previous story under the name of "Mickey McGee."

"And we are glad to welcome you here, Mr. Hardy," said the mine-manager.

He shook hands with the detective, and some introductions followed, after which the detective went in to supper.

While he was there the others discussed the situation, where the interview with the detective should be held and who should be present, and so forth, and it had not all been settled when he returned.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "I am ready for business."

"All right," responded the mayor. "We have decided to take you to the newspaper office where we can hold our meetin' in somethin' of private."

"Best way, I think. Take me where you please."

"But, we ain't decided jest who should be there, an' thought we'd let you say as to that."

"Very well. As I understand it, there are two camps near together here."

"Yes, so thar be."

"Then, why not choose some of the leading men of each camp? That, it seems to me, would be proper."

"Well, we don't 'object to that plan; leastways I don't, ef nobody else kicks about et."

"That's all right," agreed Woodworth. "Select your men, Mayor Gadzooks."

"And don't slight the *Rustler*," spoke up Editor Sneed.

"Well, they ar' soon choosed," the mayor remarked. "You, manager, and Mayor Kreeps, and Manager Prestley and his friend hyer; and Sneed, and ther poet, and myself, and Dubby, thar—that is to say, ef you two newspaper chaps won't fight."

"We will bury our differences for the time," promised Sneed.

"Wull, then, that's ther jury, so ter call et; so, come along."

"Is it understood that I am in this thing, gentlemen?" inquired the fighting poet, humbly.

"Yas, ter be sure," assured the mayor. "We wouldn't slight you, ye know; you ar' a hull team in yerself, even ef ye do spout verses."

"That is what I wanted to know. Didn't want to push myself forward, you see. But, I'm in it only as a silent partner—a passenger, as it were, for the occasion."

"For my harp is dangling on the bough  
 Of the weeping willow tree,  
 My muse is having the blues just now,  
 And here's what's left of me."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### GIVING THE DEPUTY THE CASE.

THE poet, while duly respected for his prowess, was liked for his even temper and for his easy flow of nonsensical jingles, which bubbled forth on every occasion.

The crowd laughed at his last-quoted effort, and the poet followed the others of the chosen few who left the room under the mayor's guidance.

Straight to the office of the *Rustler* the party went, and there Editor Sneed made them feel as much at home as possible.

"Now," said he, "be at home, gentlemen, and let us get at this business in a business-like way."

"And ther detective is ther head of ther meetin'," said the mayor, Gadzooks.

"That being so, I will take right hold," declared the detective. "Now, to begin with, just give me the history of the case for which you have called me."

Thereupon Manager Woodworth told the story of the day's celebration, and the finding

of the severed head in the fire-box of the fire-engine, and of its recognition by Little Maggie, as known to the reader.

"I suppose there is no doubt about that recognition," the detective observed, after thinking awhile.

"No, it was positive," said Woodworth.

"She's doubly sure," put in Gadzooks, "fer she had et dug up after et had been planted oncet, ter look at et again."

"Ha! that is the case, eh? That shows there was a slight doubt, at least."

"But, she was sure 'nuff after that," said Gadzooks.

"What made her doubtful?"

"Well, we don't jest know; she thought et over all night, I reckon, an' was not satisfied."

"That must have been it. There seems to be no doubt, then, that the head was that of the missing Joe Meadway."

"There does not seem to be any doubt," agreed Woodworth.

"That is one point fixed, then. Now, gentlemen, where was this fire-engine received from?"

"It came from Chicago," answered Woodworth.

"At a guess, how long would you think that head had been severed from the body?"

"Possibly a couple o' days; that was what we set et down at."

"Then it is plain that it did not come with the engine all the way from Chicago, but was put in it on the way somewhere."

"That looks reasonable," agreed Editor Sneed.

"Now, has any one questioned Miss Meadway about the matter?"

"Yes, I have," answered the mayor.

"Does she know whether her father had an enemy?"

"She don't think he had any."

"And she knows of no reason why any one should kill him?"

"No."

"And least of all, why his head should be sent here. It looks like a mystery, true enough."

"That is what we call it here."

"And it is one that may never be solved, for there does not seem to be much of a clue, if any."

"How do you propose going about it?" asked Mr. Murtagh.

"Why, I shall have to set out and trace the course of the engine in its journey here, and see what I can learn."

"A slow process."

"True, but the only one open to me."

"And right here I want to say a word for Rustleville," spoke out Manager Prestley. "I have talked with the mayor, and we want to say for our camp that we are ready to aid in this matter all in our power. We are willing to let all our differences rest till this murder mystery is solved."

"Then you think it was a murder?" asked the detective.

"I don't see how it could be anything else," said the manager.

"Why?"

"If suicide, the head would not be cut off."

"Unless afterward, of course. The man himself did not put his head in the box, that is true."

"Then you think it may not have been murder?" asked Woodworth.

"It may not have been; who can say? The first and only thing to be done is to track the machine and learn all we can from that source, and then we may be able to see light ahead."

"Well, we hope you will find out the truth."

"And," said the mayor, "don't let expense stand in your way. Make up your mind to win regardless of cost, and we'll back you."

"That is what Mr. Bristol always does, gentlemen, and I am his deputy. I'll bring the case out if it is in my power to do it. We stop at nothing when we undertake a matter."

"Then you hold out some hope, do you?" asked Woodworth.

"Not a great deal, yet, but still I think I may be able to bring the thing out straight."

"Do you see any clue to work upon, sir?" inquired Murtagh.

"Only the clue that we happen to know where the engine came from, and it will be possible to trace it."

"And you think it impossible that the head could have come through from Chicago?"

"You must remember I did not see the head; you have heard what others have said about it."

"Well, gentlemen, and you, Mr. Detective, I have something to make known to you—something which I have seen proper to hold back till now."

They were all interest.

"What may it be?" asked the detective, quietly.

"I have mentioned it only to my friend Prestly here. The fact is, I happen to know when and where Mr. Meadway died."

"You do?"

"Yes."

There was great interest displayed now by all save the poet, who sat as he had declared himself to be, an idle passenger.

"Tell us what you know, then," the detective invited.

"I will do so because it is my duty and because I want this mystery cleared up. Joel Meadway was a dear friend of mine, gentlemen, and I have been interesting myself in the hunt for him."

"Hal now we may be coming at something."

"Yes, as I said. Well, I found him in a hospital in Chicago: sick, or rather suffering from the effects of an accident, and there he died. Before he died he gave me his hand and told me he wanted me to wed his daughter, if I could bring her to marry me, and so become her natural protector through life."

"And did he die there, in the hospital?" asked the detective.

"Yes; and was respectably buried."

"And when was this?"

The man gave the date.

"Impossible that this can have been his head, then," the detective asserted, boldly. "It would have been far advanced in decay when it reached here. It would have been discovered by the smell."

"But, might it not have been brought, had the body been embalmed?"

"Hal that is possible. Was the body so fixed?"

"I am not prepared to say; the thought came to me, that is all. It must have been something of the kind, for the daughter here positively recognized the head as that of her father."

"Might I be allowed a word?" spoke up the poet, just there.

"Certainly," leave was given.

"You say Meadway was your friend, sir: did you recognize the head when you saw it when it was dug up?"

"I do not pretend a keen scenter to be, But this is a thought that has just come to me."

It was seen that Mr. Murtagh moved uneasily under this question for a moment before he gave his reply.

"Well, I would not swear to it," he said.

"You see, gentlemen, knowing as I did that Meadway had died in Chicago, and had been buried there, I was at a loss to account for how his head could have come here. I was in doubt—would be in doubt still, only for the fact of the daughter's being so positive."

"Here is a nice point," said the deputy detective. "The daughter had not seen her father in some time—quite a long time, in fact, while you had seen him quite recently, yet you let yourself be guided by her recognition."

"Here is a suggestion," said Mr. Murtagh, thoughtfully.

"And what is that?"

"There is one way to prove whether it is really the head of Mr. Meadway or not; and that is, by going to Chicago and having the body taken up."

"True, and I had thought of that; and then, if we find the head has been severed, that will make the mystery all the deeper. Who would do such a deed as that, and with what object in view?"

"That is the point that is puzzling us all," declared Mr. Woodworth.

"What I have told you, gentlemen, has been told in private," said Murtagh. "My desire is to win this lady for my wife if I can do it, according to the promise I made her father. It must be kept still from her, if possible. I am anxious to have the mystery solved, none the less."

"What do you suggest, then?" asked the detective.

"Going direct to Chicago, and taking up the trail there, where I know positively it properly begins."

"I believe you are right. Now I have a clue to work upon, and it may be only a short case after all. I will do all I can to sift it to the bottom."

"And if need be, I will go with you," said Murtagh. "I am willing to do all I can in the matter, no matter what it be. Still, I had rather remain here to look after the young lady."

"No doubt."



"I feel it to be more my duty, under the sad circumstances."

"Yes, remain by all means. I will set out tomorrow morning, and will return here as early as possible."

"And that seems to settle the business for the time being," observed Woodworth. "Can we do anything more, Mr. Hardy?"

"Nothing more, so far as I can see now," the detective answered. "I would advise keeping this matter as secret as possible, however, till we are done with it, for new developments may crop out ere we get through."

So, after some further remarks, the conference ended.

## CHAPTER XV.

### AFTER AN INTERVAL.

On the following morning the detective took his departure.

He left behind him something of a general feeling of great disappointment in the public mind.

They had looked for something—they hardly knew what; but, for one thing, they had expected Deadwood Dick himself; and accordingly, had expected one of his famous denouements.

Still, looking the matter squarely in the face, they did not see how the detective could have done anything more than he had, even though it had been the great Prince of the West in person instead of only a deputy. The case was one that would require time.

Roundabout went on in the even tenor of its way.

On the day following the departure of the detective, Mr. Murtagh called at the shanty of Little Maggie.

She opened the door for him and greeted him pleasantly.

At sight of her face his hopes rose, and he took the offered chair in high spirits.

"Well, I have mended your garments, Mr. Murtagh," the girl said. "I did not find very much work to do upon them."

"No, I know they were not badly in need of your art, Maggie, but they gave me the excuse for coming here, and so they served me well. What is the bill?"

"Oh! it is hardly worth anything at all—"

"Don't say that; I won't have it so. Here, here's five dollars—"

"No! No, sir! I cannot accept it, Mr. Murtagh. Just pay me a quarter; that is all I will take for the service, and it is not worth that."

"Well, well, you shall have your own way about it, dear. And now what about the important matter? Have you taken time to think it well over? If not, do not answer in haste."

"There was something I wanted to ask you, Mr. Murtagh."

"What is that, dear?"

"I have heard it said around that you gave my father a promise that you would wed me, and so protect me."

"Well, well! how did that reach your pretty ears? I would have kept that from you, for I wanted to win you on my own merit, if I could. I didn't want you to feel in any way bound to accept me."

It was said so frankly that she could hardly doubt his sincerity.

"I believe you said so, and I wanted to know whether it is true or not. You must tell me."

"Well, I cannot deny it; it is true. Said your father to me: 'Edmund, take my child and make her your wife, and so prove your friendship for me. She will not refuse you.'"

"My father said that?"

"Yes. You see, I would not have told you, for that would make it appear as though I wanted to force myself upon you anyhow. That is not the case. As I told you, I loved you at sight, before I knew who you were."

"Yes, that is so; and, you told me, too, that you meant to make me your wife, if possible, no matter who I was; and that was before you had learned anything about my father's child. Suppose I had not been she, would you then have disregarded your promise?"

It was a question that made the wily rascal pause a moment before he made reply to it.

"Now, you are rough on me," he said. "You force me to confess a weakness. I tell you candidly it would have been a severe struggle, Maggie, for your sweet face captivated me. It would have been a severe struggle, and I must admit it."

He was playing a bold stroke.

No matter how he gained the object, he want-

ed this girl for his wife, and he sought to win her regard above all other argument.

"It is honorable of you to confess it, anyhow," she said, her eyes seeking the floor as she spoke.

"I can only confess the truth," he declared.

"Well, I hope you will give me a little more time to consider, Mr. Murtagh. I do not want to answer you till I have weighed the matter fully."

"Certainly, certainly; take all the time you want. How long till you will give me the final answer? Don't let me hurry you, you know, but you must know I am anxious, loving you as I do."

"Well, I will give you the answer in two weeks from to-day, on one condition, which I will name."

"That is a good while, Maggie. I hoped it might be in a day or two. But, I gave you leave to make it any time you pleased, and so be it. What is the condition, however?"

"That you remain away from me during all that time."

"Ha! that is rough, and no mistake."

"But, you will agree to it, will you not? Your coming here again might create a talk, you know."

"Well, since I cannot help myself, I agree to it. I would agree to anything to please you. It is understood, though, that at the end of the time named you will not disappoint me."

"I will not disappoint you; you shall have the answer then, at latest. If before, you will be notified."

"Ha! then you give me a hope that it may not be two weeks! With that hope I will now take my departure. Make your answer favorable if you can, Maggie, dear."

With that he took his leave.

When he had been gone a few moments the door of an adjoining apartment opened and Fly Fan stepped forth.

"Well, how did I do it?" asked Little Maggie.

"Splendidly!" was the approving word.

"You did it even better than I hoped you could."

"But, how I hated to play the part before him! I hate the very sight of him, and it was all I could do to hold back my anger when he addressed me as he did."

"It was the better way, however, for now we have him safe for the time you have limited, and before that is up the detective will be back again with all the proofs needed."

They talked for a little time, and Fly Fan then took her leave, going out by the rear way.

The days sped swiftly by.

Our present romance might easily be made a double-number, by setting forth all that took place, but that must not be.

The rival camps kept up their rivalry, and in the next issues of the local papers went for each other hot and strong, and the fighting poet was in it, as before, in favor of Roundabout.

The circulation of the *Rustler* had doubled, since he had been on the staff, nearly all of Hustleville buying the paper in spite of all the home sheet could say in opposition, and his doggerel jingles had in some instances been set to tune and become popular songs.

He, the poet, had had one or two little fracas with tough customers from the rival camp, in which he had come off more than the victor, and his name had not suffered in consequence. He was popular and well liked, in spite of his long coat and solemn mien, but, he was not always solemn, for he could unbend to suit the occasion and be as jolly as anybody.

Fly Fan was still there, and it was whispered around that Manager Woodworth was struck on her.

Certain it was that he lost no opportunity of being in her company, but she held him at a certain distance in spite of himself and all that public opinion might say or think.

By this time it had become well enough established as a fact that Fly Fan was as true as gold, and that she was a woman who would stand no nonsense of any kind. She was a mystery, and no one knew any more about her than had been known at first. That she had been able to make a companion of Little Maggie was all the credential her character needed.

There had, too, been one fire in the camp, and the fire-engine had been tested in actual practice. The fire, which might have proved a bad one, was nipped in the bud, as it was said, and even the citizens of Hustleville had to acknowledge that the engine filled a positive want grandly.

And Hustleville, in order to come up with its rival again, was quietly making arrange-

ments for an electric light plant, with which they hoped to eclipse and dazzle their neighbors most effectually.

So, as said, to recount all these things in detail would make our story of double length; but, let us keep to the main facts of interest.

Finally, one day, a letter was received from Detective Hardy, stating that he had finished the business and announcing when he would return.

This, naturally, raised a good deal of interest in the camp, and on the night when he was looked for the whole city and half of Hustleville were on hand to meet the stage.

They were not disappointed.

When the stage drew up the detective sprang out, and was greeted heartily by Mayor Gadzooks and others.

The crowd was impatient, and could not wait quietly till the business was made known to them after it had been privately made known to the leaders, so one man in the crowd sung out:

"What 'bout ther head, Mr. Deputy Detective? Did ye find out anything 'bout who done ther deed?"

"I have found out all about it, gentlemen," was the reply. "If your mayor is in favor of calling a public meeting, I will tell my story so that all may hear it."

That proposition was greeted with a perfect storm of applause, and it was immediately apparent that the crowd was bound the mayor should order that very thing. It was just what they wanted.

"What d'ye say, mayor?" they urged at once.

"We'll put up ther platform hyer while ther detective gent eats his supper!"

"That's what's ther matter! That's what we want, ma'r! You might jest as well say yes an' be done with et."

"All right, boys, that's what we'll have, then," the mayor agreed. "You set ter work and put up ther old platform, and after supper we'll hear ther story; that is, if ther gentleman don't 'bjeck to tellin' et that way."

"That will just suit me," said Hardy. "It will satisfy your people better than anything else, and I promise you that I have something to say that will interest them. Go ahead, boys, and build up your stage, and as soon as I have filled up the inner man I'll be with you. I'm as hungry as a bear."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE UNMASKING.

NEVER worked the citizens of Roundabout with more vim and enthusiasm than on that occasion.

Every man of them put his shoulder to the wheel, and by the time the detective had finished his meal, the platform was ready.

It was the same one, by the way, that had been used on the occasion of the great demonstration in honor of the new fire-engine, and was calculated to hold a number of persons.

Mr. Murtagh had followed the detective to the dining-room, eager, as he admitted, to learn what had been accomplished, but he did not make out very well. The detective told him the dead man had been taken up, and that it had been found that his head was missing.

Further than that, however, he put the question off, saying it would be far easier for him, the detective, to make one job of it when he told the story to the public.

So, Mr. Murtagh had to be content, eager as he was, and his eagerness was not to be concealed from the close observer.

Supper done with, the deputy detective made his appearance, and he was greeted with a cheer, and invited to get up on the platform and get down to business at once.

With a smile the detective bowed his willingness, and making his way through the crowd, mounted the steps to the platform, where he looked upon the sea of eager faces that surrounded him, remaining for a moment silent.

Then he said:

"Citizens of Roundabout, this looks rather lonesome for me, here on this platform all alone; I want company. Mayor Gadzooks, you and some of your friends come up here with me. And, further, I would like to have Miss Meadow present, if she will come. Is there any one who will bring her?"

"Yes; I will," spoke up Fly Fan from her place in the crowd.

"Very well; do so; and then bear her company on the platform as well, if you please. You—Mr. Woodworth, Mr. Prestley, Mr. Murtagh—all come up and take seats. Invite whom you please, mayor, while we wait for the young lady."



The mayor mentioned names, and in a few moments the platform was comfortably peopled, among the rest being the two newspaper editors and the poet laureate of the *Rustler*.

In a little while Fly Fan came back, bringing Little Maggie with her, and together they mounted the steps and took seats.

It was noticed that the fighting poet held a prominent place.

The deputy detective had taken his seat, and he now rose again and stepped forward to tell his story.

"Citizens," he said, "I have performed the work that you gave me to do, and am here to report the results. I have found that a murder was done, and it was the head of the victim that came here in the box of the fire-engine.

"I went from here to Chicago, and guided by the information given me by Mr. Murtagh here, visited the hospital where, as he said, Mr. Meadway had died. There I found the record, straight and true; and the next thing to be done was to disinter the body and learn whether the head had been severed from it or not.

"We went to the place where the body had been laid to rest, and had it taken up. On opening the coffin, true enough, the head was missing! It had been severed, and there were marks on the box and on the coffin to prove that it had been taken up and the head severed from the trunk after it had been buried. That, it would seem, was all the proof needed to establish beyond all doubt the identity of the head found here.

"I had further tests to make, however. I had with me a photograph of the head that came in the box of the fire-engine, and showing that to the men at the hospital I asked them if they remembered it as the face of Mr. Meadway. They were struck at once with surprise, declaring emphatically it was not the same face at all. Here, then, arose a complication; if it was not the same face, which person had been mistaken in the matter of identity—Mr. Murtagh, or Miss Meadway?"

As he put the question, the speaker turned to Murtagh.

That worthy was somewhat pale, and a troubled look was upon his face. What did it mean?

"There was positively no mistake on my part," he declared.

"Very well, sir," the detective accepted. "I went back again to the cemetery and made a thorough search around, with the help of the man who attended that part of the grounds, and presently, at some distance from the grave, we discovered where a sod or two had been taken up and replaced. We dug there, and under the spot we found a man's head, which, strange to say, was recognized by the people of the hospital as the head of the man they had buried under the name of Meadway. A strange affair, is it not, Mr. Murtagh?"

He turned again to that gentleman, who was not only somewhat pale, but decidedly white.

"Why, what's the matter, sir?" the detective asked, to draw the attention of all to him. "Are you ill? You look like a ghost."

"No, no; there's nothing the matter with me," the man declared. "Go on with your story. It was the horror of it all that made me feel faint, that was all, sir."

"Oh! Well, to continue. I had a photograph taken of that face, and set about discovering who the person was, if possible. At the Police Headquarters I got a list of all the men who had been reported missing about that time, and with my photograph in hand I made a canvass of the addresses given, and finally I discovered the one I was seeking. The photograph was recognized as the likeness of one Peter Ruckler, a man who had disappeared from his home suddenly and had never been heard of again. So, you see, gentlemen, Mr. Murtagh must have been mistaken after all, for several persons positively identified the head as that of Ruckler."

"I was not mistaken," cried Murtagh. "Don't you suppose I knew my friend?"

"It certainly appears that you did not, for Ruckler and Meadway looked nothing alike; besides, I happen to know that Mr. Meadway is alive now."

"What! Meadway alive! Ha! ha! ha! Why, sir, you are an ass, that is what you are; you are no more a detective than the poet here is one. Miss Meadway here has positively identified the head as that of her father. How Joel Meadway can be alive without his head is more than I can understand."

"That would be impossible, of course; he is not alive without his head, for he has it upon his shoulders intact. As to my being an ass, per-

haps I am; but when you compare my detective ability to that of the poet here, as you call him, you do me proud. Gentlemen of Roundabout, allow me to introduce my respected chief, Deadwood Dick, Junior, who will now address you, doing fuller justice to the subject than I can possibly render."

He had laid a hand upon the shoulder of the poet, as he spoke, and now that worthy rose and made a bow.

"Since my identity has been made known to you, gentlemen," he said, "I may as well cast off the mask and appear in proper person before you."

Even as he spoke his face took on a changed expression, and with a sweep of the hand he removed the wig of long hair from his head, and, lo! there he was, the redoubtable Richard!

The cheer that went up fairly made the gulch ring.

Could it be possible that the Prince of the West had been playing such a role among them for so long a time, unsuspected?

For a couple of minutes or so nothing could be heard save the shouting and cheering in wild confusion, and during that time a silent pantomime was performed upon the platform.

Edmund Murtagh was seen to rise and move as if to leave the platform by the rear, but Fly Fan, the girl sport, sprung up and placed a revolver to his head and detained him. The next moment Deadwood Dick turned and placed handcuffs upon the man's wrists.

The excitement went beyond all bounds.

Finally, by urgent motionings, Deadwood Dick brought the crowd to something like order, and began to address them.

Eager to hear, they became quiet again, and he said:

"Fellow-citizens, I have been playing a little game of deception with you, as you are now aware, and I beg your pardon. It was all in the way of business, however. By your leave I will tell you all about the strange case.

"By a strange combination of circumstances, I was here when you sent for me, as you are now aware. By the same mail I sent letters to my aides, and the result is what you have seen. Mr. Hardy came to you, bearing a letter from me, although that letter had been written right here in the Union Hotel.

"I had come here with my wife—Gentlemen, let me introduce Mrs. Bristol, who has been known to you for some time as Fly Fan."

Kodak Kate gave Dick her hand and bowed to the throng, amidst another wild and prolonged cheer.

"We came here," Dick resumed, when he could be heard, "in the interests of a matter of which this case of yours has turned out to be a part. It is a strange complication to say the least about it. We came here in the behalf of Joel Meadway.

"You show surprise, and well you may, all things considered. Let me give you the facts of the matter. Mr. Joel Meadway came to Bristol City awhile ago to see me, telling me a strange story. I recognized that he was not right in his mind, but at the same time I was able to perceive that there was some foundation of truth in what he told me.

"He was, he said, a wronged man. He had once been rich, but had been cheated out of all his property by a rascally twin brother, and thus beggared. This twin brother was a villain, and became the willing tool of some sharpers, and, taking upon himself the identity of his brother for the occasion, bargained and sold all the property. When Joel learned what had been done, as he soon did, he fought the case, but lost it. Witnesses were brought to prove that he was the man who had sold the property, and as the consideration had been great, there was no redress. The twin brother was unknown, and the unfortunate man was unable to prove that he had a twin brother.

"His great loss wrecked his mind, and he wandered forth after the death of his wife, taking his little girl with him, and his despoilers proceeded to enjoy their ill-gotten gains, squandering his wealth with lavish hands. Here it might have ended, but it came to their knowledge that their victim had another and even greater property in his own right, of which neither he nor they had known anything at that time, and they laid their plans for getting hold of that as well. But, the twin brother had meantime become lost to them, and they could not again work their scheme in the same manner. So, they thought of another plan. By the death of Meadway the property would fall to his daughter, so it was arranged that he should be put out of the way and then one of the plotters would seek to marry the girl.

"Two of the rascals are Edmund Murtagh and Aaron Prestley here—No use your denying it, for we have the proofs. And there are others whom it will be easy for us to find and arrest, now. We did suspect Mr. Woodworth, too, but after shadowing him closely, as my wife has been doing, we find that he had no part in it, but is an honest man as the average goes.

"Now, how did the scheme work? First, they wanted to prove the death of Mr. Meadway. They had him in sight, as they believed, but, as it happened, it was the rascally twin brother. They provided a subject for the hospital, whom Murtagh identified as Joel Meadway, and when he died he was buried under that name. Then the body was taken up and the head severed and hidden elsewhere.

"Oh! it was a hideous scheme, and they deserve all the punishment that can be justly given them. They deserve no mercy, and they will get none."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE END.

SHOUTS were heard in the crowd for the lynching of the rascals then and there, but Deadwood Dick stood ready to defend them.

"Let us have none of that talk," he ordered, sternly. "The law will deal with them all in due time. The days of lynching are past, in a camp that lays claim to being under the laws of the land."

"Give us the rest of the story, then," cried out one man.

"Yes, I will carry it forward to its ending. When the sham Mr. Meadway had been disposed of, then it was necessary that proof should be shown the daughter of his death, and not only her, but all interested in her. How was it done? Henry Meadway, the brother, was killed, and it was intended to bring his head here secretly and leave it in the camp to be discovered.

"At the place where the murder was done, however, fortune favored the assassin, for on a freight car, near the spot where the murder was done, was found the fire-engine that was coming here, and the head of the victim was put in the fire-box of the engine and the body hid away in a secret place. Investigation had been provided for, you see. Murtagh would tell what he knew about the death of Mr. Meadway in the hospital, and if the body was taken up it would be found that the head was missing.

"How and why such a thing had been done, would, they believed, be a mystery for all time, but it would be known clearly enough that Meadway was dead, and then the daughter would be heir to all his estate. You see the scheme now, do you not? Murtagh has been working to marry the girl, and then he would pay the other rascals their proportion of the profits. But, thanks to the clever work done by Mr. Hardy, in whom I am well pleased, we have nipped their game in the bud, so to say, and it has come to naught. Joel Meadway is at Bristol City, alive and well."

"Three cheers for Deadwood Dick, his wife, and their hull combination!" one man proposed.

And they were given with a will. The crowd could not contain itself at all, so great was the excitement of the hour.

"Further," Dick concluded, "you will recall that Mr. Prestley thought he recognized my wife as his, and we have had time to investigate that matter. We have discovered his poor, wronged wife, living in a wretched condition in a camp up in Colorado, where he deserted her, and if he has any property I mean to see that she shall have a share of it. She has sent us her photograph, and there is a striking likeness between her face and that of my wife, enough to warrant the mistake he made.

"What can I say in conclusion? This man Murtagh, whose right name is Pelmont, I shall hold for murder, for he it was who killed Henry Meadway, taking him to be Joel. Also Prestley, who was an accomplice in the business. And the others will be arrested in due time, for we have found them out and they shall not escape us. It has been an eventful case, and it was a well-laid scheme and one that might have been successful; but, as it seems, Providence took a hand in the play against the villains, and they have come to grief. It is a case in which we are not going to take the credit to ourselves, except so far as it belongs to Mr. Hardy.

"So, good citizens, if I have deceived you for a little time, forgive me. I was here on business, as you can now understand. And, no harm has been done anyhow. I want to offer an especial apology to the citizens of Hustleville for anything I may have said in that crazy poetry of mine—so-called—that did not fit them well. It was all in the way of fun, you know. And,



concluding—do not attempt to interfere with my prisoners, boys, for that will only make trouble for somebody, and it may be the means putting another green mound or two in the planting-ground at Hustleville; so don't attempt it, anybody."

"Don't reckon any of us will do that!" sung out Knocker-out Jeems. "Ef I had knowed et was you, Mr. Deadwood Dick, you bet I wouldn't sassed you like I did."

That raised a laugh, and Dick and his aides, with their prisoners, got down from the stand.

The rest of that night was spent in a jubilee time, in which both camps took part on the best of terms, and Dick and his wife were royally entertained.

On the following day they set out for home, their prisoners with them. Later on the villains were duly convicted and sentenced, as they deserved to be. And it was a clear case against them.

The meeting between Little Maggie and her father was an affectionate one, as can be imagined. Mr. Meadway, with the help of Deadwood Dick, secured his rights, and with them his reason came back again, and he is now happy in the love of his faithful child.

The rival camps, by the way, are about to become reconciled. They have grown till they are cramped for room, and the Choke is to be blasted out in order to give the towns room to expand, and it is likely the place will become one city under a new name at an early date. Deadwood Dick is well remembered there, and, as it is not a long distance from his own city, he gets over there occasionally.

Dick has had to organize something of a regular detective agency, of which, of course, he is the head and chief, with his noble wife only second to himself. Dolan Hardy is his right-hand man, so to call him, and properly so, for Dick can trust him in any emergency. Then, too, there are the boys, Billy Bucket and Johnny Smile, who have been met in previous stories, to say nothing of the venerable, reliable Old Avalanche, the "Original Great Injun Annihilator." An almost irresistible combination, of a verity. Long may they live and flourish!

THE END.

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